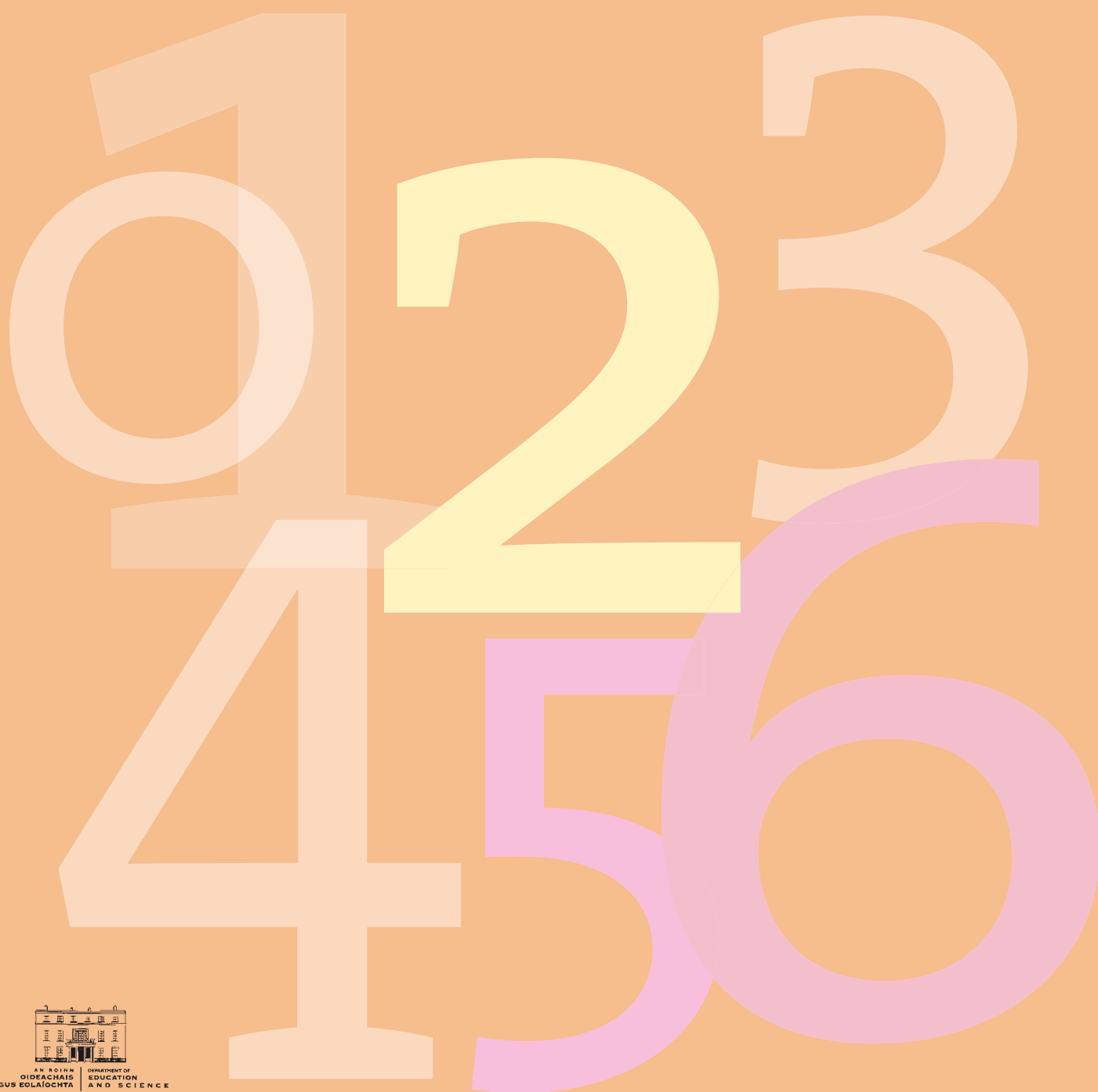




Developing the workforce in the early childhood care and education sector

Background discussion paper



Copyright © Minister for Education and Science, 2009
Department of Education and Science
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1
Tel: 01 889 6400
E-mail: info@education.gov.ie
Web: www.education.ie

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission in writing of the copyright holder.

For rights of reproduction, application should be made to
Change Management Unit, Department of Education and Science,
Marlborough Street, Dublin 1

Developing the workforce in the
early childhood care and education sector
Background discussion paper

Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
RATIONALE AND CONTEXT	2
Childcare or Childcare And Education	2
Origins of the Workforce	3
Societal Issues	4
Children’s Rights	5
The Practice Environment in the ECCE Sector	5
International Perspectives	8
Summary	9
OCCUPATIONAL PROFILES – SETTING STANDARDS	10
Introduction	10
Building Occupational Profiles	10
Mapping of Occupational Profiles to the National Framework of Qualifications	12
Review of Occupational Profiles	12
Findings and Implications for the Workforce Development Plan	13
Standards for Education and Training in Early Childhood Care and Education	13
UK Awards	13
European Qualifications Framework (EQF)	14
Summary	14
PROFILE OF CURRENT WORKFORCE	15
Introduction	15
Quarterly National Household Survey – Module on Childcare	15
National Skills Database Statistics	15
Validating the Data on the Profile of the Workforce	20
Summary	21
SUPPLY OF SKILLED WORKERS	22
Introduction	22
National Higher Level Awards in ECCE	22
Participation in Higher Level Courses	24
Further Education and Training Provision	26
FÁS Initiatives – ‘One Step Up’	28
Summary	30
STATE INVESTMENT IN TRAINING WITHIN THE ECCE SECTOR	31
Further Education and Training – VEC Provision	32
Community and Voluntary Sector funded under NCIP	32
Higher Education and Training	33
Summary	33
DEMAND FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING COURSES	34
Introduction	34
Labour Market Demand	34
Projected Demand	34
Summary	35

ACCESS TO, AND EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING	36
Introduction	36
Facilitating Life Long Learning	36
European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)	37
Flexible Learning	37
Work-based Learning	38
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	38
Learner Engagement	40
Retention of a Qualified Workforce	40
Summary	41
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	42
Introduction	42
Changing Practice Environments	42
The Demand for Education and Training	42
Meeting this Demand	43
Access and Effective Participation in Education and Training Programmes	44
Supply of Education and Training Places	45
Retention of Qualified Staff in the ECCE Workforce	46
Concluding Comments	46
APPENDIX A – MEMBERSHIP OF THE INTERDEPARTMENTAL WORKING GROUP	47
APPENDIX B – MEMBERSHIP OF THE SECTORAL STANDARDS SUB COMMITTEE	48
APPENDIX C: NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK	49
ACRONYMS	50
REFERENCES	51
FEEDBACK TEMPLATE	53

Introduction

Developing the workforce in childcare services has long been identified as central to the delivery of high quality experiences and environments for young children. This discussion document has been designed to provide background information that will support and promote constructive debate on how best to ensure that education and training programmes make a positive contribution to this important agenda. The document draws on data from research policy and practice to give a broad overview of the rationale, context and challenges of workforce development in the early childhood care and education sector.

It seeks to build on the widespread consultation process which culminated in the publication of *Quality Childcare and Lifelong Learning: A Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in Early Childhood Care and Education* (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform [DJELR], 2002).

An inter-Departmental group was set up to lead the process. This group was drawn from funding Departments such as the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Department of Health and Children and the Department of Education and Science and their agencies including FÁS and the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education¹ (CECDE). Their work was supported by a sectoral standards sub-group drawn from the Awarding Bodies² and from the training providers. Membership details can be seen at Appendices A and B.

To support the process, a number of papers were commissioned. These are published electronically on www.omc.gov.ie and include:

- An analysis by FÁS of the demand and supply of labour in the childcare related sector.
- A comparative mapping across the *Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in Early Childhood Care and Education 2002* (DJELR, 2002), *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CECDE, 2006) and *Aistear*, the Framework for Early Learning (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2009).
- An analysis of a 2007/8 survey of the educational attainment of the workforce.
- An analysis of course provision at Post Leaving Certificate level.
- An analysis of Future Skills Needs in the childcare sector in Ireland (FGS Consulting, forthcoming).

This discussion document is structured to address a number of distinct but interrelated areas. Each section includes an overview of the key issues, including relevant research literature and statistical information. Together with the background papers, this document will inform a consultative process which invites comments and submissions on the key issues and challenges facing workforce development.

It is planned that consultation will take place over the next three months and that, building on this consultation, the Workforce Development Plan will be published. See www.omc.gov.ie for information on the consultation process or contact the Early Years Education Policy Unit at earlychildhood@education.gov.ie.

¹ The CECDE closed on 30th November 2008

² The Awarding Bodies are the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology.

Rationale and Context

This section of the document provides an overview of policy, provision and practice in early childhood care and education (ECCE) in Ireland, focusing on the policy and societal issues that have affected the development of the childcare sector.

Childcare or Childcare and Education

One of the challenges in developing national policy related to the provision of services for children aged birth to six years is the separation of childcare from early childhood education in terms of policy, funding, delivery and staffing (OECD, 2006).

Unlike the education system which is clearly defined, services in Ireland that provide for the out-of-home care and education of children aged birth to six years are described variously as crèches, nurseries, pre-schools, playgroups, after-school clubs, etc. This reflects the variety of purposes which are attributed to these services including caring for children of working parents and providing opportunities for early educational experiences for young children.

National Policy

If national policy is examined for a unanimous definition of early childhood service provision, the same diversity is reflected. In 1999, following extensive consultation, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR) used the following definition of childcare in the *National Childcare Strategy: Report of the Expert Working Group on Childcare*.

“...daycare facilities and services for pre-school children and school-going children out of school hours. It includes services offering care, education and socialisation opportunities for children to the benefit of children, parents, employers and the wider community. Thus, services such as pre-schools, naionraí [Irish language pre-schools], daycare services, crèches, play groups, childminding and after-school groups are included, but schools (primary, secondary and special) and residential centres for children are excluded” (DJELR, 1999).

However, despite the use of the term ‘childcare’ to describe these services, the report also recognised that *‘Care and education are inextricably linked elements in a child’s holistic development – this reality must be reflected in the ethos and programme of all services.’* (ibid: 45). In the same year, the Department of Education and Science (DES) published *Ready to Learn - The White Paper on Early Childhood Education* (DES, 1999) which refers to services that mirror those dealt with in the DJELR publication. This parallel use of terminology to refer to the same range of service provision converged in 2002 with the publication by the DJELR of *Quality Childcare and Lifelong Learning: A Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in Early Childhood Care and Education*. This publication set out, for the first time in Ireland, to make clear statements about the occupational profiles and associated qualifications of the workforce in early childhood service provision. In consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, the term ‘early childhood care and education’ was agreed upon to reflect the policy set out in the White Paper that *‘... for young children, education and care should not be separated, but should be provided in a complementary, seamless fashion’* (DES 1999:4).

It is evident from even this cursory examination of terminology and definitions, that the term childcare cannot be interpreted narrowly and should be understood as interchangeable with 'early childhood education' and indeed the more widely used and accepted term Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). Recent national policy initiatives such as the development of *Siolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CECDE, 2006) and *Aistear*, the Framework for Early Learning (NCCA, 2009), have further embedded this term within the lexicon of practice in early childhood. The recently announced free pre-school year for children in the year before attending primary school will bring greater cohesion to the nature of children's experiences in a range of early childhood settings.

This discussion document does not, however, look at workforce development for staff working in infant classes or in the Early Start programme within the primary school system.

Origins of the Workforce

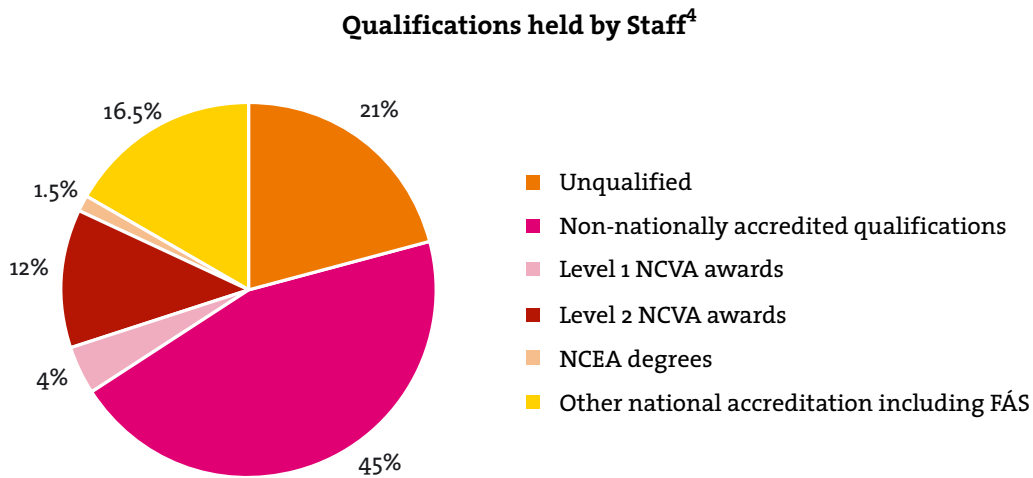
The current high level of awareness and attention being given to ECCE at national policy level is quite recent. Outside the State funded primary school system, investment in pre-school provision was traditionally targeted to support children in need of specific intervention, including educational disadvantage and children with special needs. The ECCE needs of babies, young children and their families were met instead by a broad range of community and voluntary and private enterprises. ECCE service provision was unregulated until 1997 and when these Child Care Regulations came into effect, no stipulation was made regarding the qualifications necessary to deliver such services beyond a reference to '*...appropriate experience in caring for children and/or an appropriate qualification...*' (Department of Health and Children, 1996).

The organic growth of services impacted directly on the evolution of the ECCE workforce. Many services, especially those provided by the community and voluntary sector relied heavily on volunteer staff. Even in the private-for-profit sector, salaries were low and conditions of employment poor. Opportunities for employment in State funded services were very limited (excluding national teachers in infant classes) and similarly characterised by low status and low wages. Working in 'childcare' was not generally viewed as a desirable career choice.

A census of childcare provision commissioned by the DJELR and carried out in 1999 by Area Development Management (ADM)³ provides the only statistical data on the ECCE workforce at the time. The picture that emerged from this census was that of childcare as a female dominated sector dependent on Community Employment (CE) and Job Initiative schemes '*...A wide diversity was found in the type and level of qualifications held by staff in childcare facilities and a substantial number were found to have no formal qualifications...the average salaries for both full and part-time staff were poor... one quarter of all facilities relied on volunteers...*' (ADM, 2003:61-70).

³ ADM is now known as POBAL

Figure 1: Qualifications Profile of Staff in Childcare centres participating in the 1999 Census



Since this ADM census, employment data sourced from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and reported on by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit of FÁS shows a major shift upwards in the educational qualifications of people employed in childcare occupations. This is supported by a survey of the educational attainment of the workforce which was commissioned in 2007/2008 and which found that 41% of staff had attained a FETAC Level 5 qualification in childcare and only 12% of staff had no formal childcare qualifications.

Societal Issues

The era from 1990 to the present day is characterised by dramatic changes in all aspects of life in Ireland. The population has grown from 3.6 million in 1996 to 4.2 million at present (CSO, 2006a). The number of children under six rose from 256,703 in 1996 to 360,415 in 2006 (ibid). While the 2002 Census showed that foreign nationals made up 5.8% of the population, the 2006 census shows that this figure has almost doubled to 10.2%. Between 2002 and 2006, the population grew by a little over 8%. The two contributing factors were a continuous increase in the number of births and inward migration. Until mid 2008, the Irish economy grew at an unprecedented rate. Women's participation in the workforce, which has lagged behind our European counterparts, reached 55.1% in Q3 2007⁵ compared to 35.8% in 1990. The Government's response to the changing situation for children and families included a wide range of initiatives designed to support the challenges of achieving work life balance. In particular, the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (2000 – 2006) and its successor, the National Childcare Investment Programme (2006 – 2010) stimulated the creation and subsequent retention of over 40,000 childcare places through capital funding and subvention of the cost of delivery of services. This has been a major factor in the growth of the childcare workforce since 2000. Rising unemployment figures may impact on the demand for out-of-home care and education services and population statistics may be affected if

⁴ NCVA has been integrated into the Further Education Training Awards Council (FETAC) and NCVA level 1 and level 2 are now known as levels 4 and level 5 in the National Framework of Qualifications, respectively. NCEA is now known as the Higher Education Training Awards Council (HETAC).

⁵ ILO participation rates

outward migration once again becomes a reality. The provision of a universal pre-school place in the year prior to starting primary school was announced in the April 2009 budget. This initiative should help to mitigate some of the uncertainty in the sector created by the current economic downturn. It is, however, realistic to assume that, in the short-term, the sustained period of growth in the ECCE sector that characterised the past decade may level out or reduce.

Children's Rights

In societal terms, recent decades have witnessed developments in the recognition of the rights of children. This includes a number of declarations and conventions on the rights of children. The vision as set out in the 10 year National Children's Strategy is '*..An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential..*' (DHC, 2000:4).

Recent policy developments promote the importance of regarding the early childhood period from birth to six years as a continuum in a child's life during which the child has both care and education needs. *Ready to Learn - the White Paper on Early Childhood Education* (DES, 1999), made a clear commitment to

"Support the development and educational achievement of children through high quality early education, with particular focus on the target groups of the disadvantaged and those with special needs" (DES, 1999:14).

It goes on to identify the characteristics of this early education as being underpinned by quality, built on existing provision, and in partnership with parents, providers and interested parties. Early intervention is identified as essential, particularly for those children at risk of educational disadvantage (ibid:15).

The Practice Environment in the ECCE Sector

Since 2000, significant developments have impacted upon the practice environment in the ECCE sector, and these are summarised under the following headings:

- Funding
- Regulation
- Quality improvement
- International perspectives.

Funding

The Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006 (EOCP) and its successor, the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 (NCIP) represent a major investment by the State in ECCE services. Driven by an equality of opportunity agenda for working parents, the EOCP facilitated the development of new childcare places to allow parents to remain in or to return to the labour market. Financial measures to improve the quality of services were also available. These included establishing City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) to promote training and quality awareness and providing staffing support grants to community-based services with a focus on disadvantage. Funding was also made available for National Voluntary Childcare Organisations (NVCOs) to help their members improve their services.

Using this funding, some NVCOs developed quality assurance programmes and training opportunities. Collectively, these developments and initiatives contributed to an increase in the level of qualifications amongst the ECCE workforce since 2000.

The current investment programme, the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 (NCIP), is under the direction of the Office for the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). The NCIP provides a more proactive response to the development of quality childcare supports and services, which are planned for and developed locally through the CCC infrastructure. The programme has a target of creating 50,000 new childcare places nationwide with the objective of assisting parents to access affordable, quality childcare.

It is expected that by the end of 2010, the need for major capital investment in childcare may have been met and that the focus of any future childcare programme(s) may, as a result, move towards longer-term objectives more clearly aligned with supporting the broader principles of early childhood care and education. This has already begun with the announcement in the recent Budget of an early childhood care and education initiative which provides for the introduction of a pre-school year with an educational focus for children in the year before they start primary school. This initiative will add value to the childcare places created under the capital and infrastructural development programmes.

Regulation

The Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations (DHC, 1996) came into effect in 1997 and apply to pre-schools, playgroups, day nurseries, crèches, childminders looking after three or more children, and similar services catering for children aged birth to six but do not apply to infant classes in primary schools. The Regulations outlined the requirements for services to provide a quality environment and include health and safety issues, staff-child ratios, space afforded per child, ventilation, lighting and insurance requirements. The 1996 Regulations did not, however, focus on many important elements of practice such as adult-child interactions, extending and enriching children's learning by understanding each child as a learner, and planning, creating and using a stimulating and nurturing learning environment.

While there was no stipulation within the Regulations for adults to have any formal qualifications to work in an early childhood setting, they did raise awareness of the need for adults to participate in some education and training in order to be appropriately prepared and skilled to work with children in the various settings.

These Regulations were revoked in 2007 when the revised Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006 came into effect. The new Regulations envisage a broader remit for pre-school services than previous. The core obligations of the adult practitioner in a childcare setting are set out in Part II, Section 5 and state that,

“A person carrying on a pre-school service shall ensure that each child's learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the service through the provision of the appropriate opportunities, experiences, activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child and the child's cultural context”.

This Regulation is supported by an explanatory guideline which states that

“In planning activities to support each child’s development, which are reflective of the philosophy and ethos of the service....., each child’s individual needs, interests and abilities should be considered. The provider should be pro-active in ensuring that appropriate action is taken to address each child’s needs in co-operation with his/her parents and following consultation, where appropriate, with other relevant services”.

In addition, the guidelines also make reference to national policy documents as a source of potential support for clarification on the details of this Regulation. While these Regulations do not include a formal requirement for adults to be qualified, the guidelines clearly recognise the relationship between qualifications of staff and meeting the requirements of the Regulations:

“It is acknowledged that many childcare staff have a qualification or are working towards achieving one. In centre-based services, it is considered that the person in charge should aim to have at least fifty percent of childcare staff with a qualification appropriate to the care and development of children. The qualified staff should rotate between age groupings”.

The obligations of the adult practitioner regarding the child’s well-being, learning and development are complex and challenging and contain clear implications that he/she will need to acquire a specific body of knowledge and skills in advance of engaging in practice. In addition, it also implies the need for continual updating of knowledge and skills to reflect the dynamic and evolving nature of policy, research and practice in this field.

Quality Improvement

State investment in the sector enabled the development, by the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations and the City and County Childcare Committees, of a variety of initiatives to address quality improvement in ECCE service provision. These include quality assurance processes, education and training courses and networking and mentoring opportunities (CECDE, 2005). The quality improvement measures all identified the importance of skilled and appropriately qualified staff as central to the achievement of quality standards. This is very much in line with international literature which highlights the relationship between the qualifications of staff and the quality of service provision, (Oberhuemer and Ulich, 1997; Sylva *et al.*, 2004; Oberhuemer, 2005; OECD, 2006; Peeters, 2008). In addition to these local initiatives, two important national developments have been completed which, together, provide clear guidance regarding the scope and nature of professional practice in early childhood care and education. These are *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CECDE, 2006) and *Aistear*, the Framework for Early Learning (NCCA, 2009).

Practice Frameworks Implications

The guidelines set out in the Childcare (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006 are designed to support practitioners with compliance with the Regulations. In these guidelines, the *National Children’s Strategy* (DHC, 2000), the *Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development* (DJELR, 2002) and *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CECDE, 2006) are referred to as sources of additional information regarding practice in ECCE. Each provides specific details as to the nature of the knowledge and skills necessary for professional practice leading to both quality provision of childcare services and positive, enriching early

years experiences for children. The guidelines also identify *Aistear*, the Framework for Early Learning (NCCA, 2009) as an important contributor to the development of professional practice in early childhood care and education settings. Both *Síolta* and *Aistear* stress the importance of the adult in supporting the optimal well-being, learning and development of the child. The centrality of a highly skilled, knowledgeable and competent adult supporting children's early learning and development, is also a fundamental premise upon which *Síolta* and *Aistear* are built.

Emergence of a Professional Association

A recent development which has the potential to impact on practice in ECCE in Ireland is the emergence of a professional association. In 2007, the Association of Childcare Professionals (ACP) was established with the following expressed aims;

- To define a professional identity for people working in the early years and school aged childcare sector.
- To form a body to which workers can affiliate.
- To advocate for the rights of its members to equitable pay and work conditions.
- To promote, develop and support the continuing professional development of childcare professionals.

(source www.acp-cork.com accessed 12/3/2008)

The ACP has published a set of recommended pay scales for childcare workers and a set of occupational roles ranging from Childcare Assistant to Childcare Manager together with associated qualifications. These attest to the validity of the occupational role descriptors detailed in the *2002 Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in Early Childhood Care and Education* document. The emergence of the ACP is an indicator of the increasing commitment of the childcare workforce to professional standards of practice and the drive towards the establishment and recognition of a qualified status for professional practitioners.

International Perspectives

In 2004, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) carried out a review of Ireland's ECCE provision. The review was part of an OECD initiative which focused on ECCE in twenty countries (OECD, 2002, 2006). The OECD noted that there was great disparity between the qualifications, status and terms and conditions of employment between those practitioners employed in the statutory sector as teachers and those employed in non-statutory (community, voluntary and private) services. Those in the non-statutory sector were generally low paid and had lower levels of qualifications than their colleagues in primary schools. Conceptualisations of the professional role were also observed to be diverse ranging '*...from a highly formalised, subject oriented school teaching approach to a play based, informal approach with little learning taking place*' (OECD, 2004:60). The OECD review team concluded that issues of pedagogy needed to be addressed across all settings whether that setting was characterised as 'care' or 'education'. The review team recommended a thorough re-assessment of training for the early childhood classroom teacher and also identified the need for a co-ordinated structure to support the educational development of the ECCE workforce across all settings.

In 2006, the OECD published a thematic review of ECCE systems in 20 participating countries which set out key policy objectives for the development of ECCE into the

future. In relation to staffing, the recommendation stated that *'[T]he quality of ECEC (early childhood education and care) systems requires effective staff training and fair working conditions'* (OECD, 2006). The report argued strongly for the development of a new occupational profile which crossed traditional boundaries of care and education and which encompassed responsibilities associated with social care and children's well-being whilst effectively supporting children's learning. The report identified that policy initiatives/commitments in all the countries reviewed created a blueprint for the role of ECCE practitioners that was complex and demanding. Translating this blueprint into reality would necessitate the review and development of pre- and in-service education and training (OECD 2006:158-172).

In addition to the OECD studies, a wealth of international research has identified that many of the responsibilities placed upon ECCE practitioners are complex, non-routine and require specialised skills and knowledge (Moss 2006; Peeters, 2008.) This, combined with the literature that relates quality of children's experiences directly with the qualification levels of practitioners, reinforces the position that the ECCE workforce should be highly skilled and professionally prepared.

Summary

It is clear from this review that the workforce in ECCE in Ireland has experienced significant changes in both its qualifications profile and work environment. Government investment has encouraged positive developments in both these areas and substantial progress has been made towards creating the necessary infrastructure for the future development of high quality ECCE services. International research has identified that many of the responsibilities placed upon ECCE practitioners are complex, non-routine and require specialised skills and knowledge. This, combined with the literature that relates quality of children's experiences directly with the qualification levels of practitioners, reinforces the position that the ECCE workforce should be highly skilled and professionally prepared.

In the past decade there has been substantial investment to enable the delivery of a vastly improved childcare infrastructure. Internationally acclaimed curriculum and quality standards have also been developed and these have the potential to add value to these places and deliver quality pre-school education. However, despite these positive achievements, many challenges still remain. There is a need to ensure that the workforce acquires the capacity to implement theory and policy in practice. Participation in early education opportunities, particularly for those groups of children who are otherwise at risk of educational disadvantage, should be encouraged and co-ordination across all initiatives that provide for the care and education for children aged birth to six years remains an important goal. Participation in quality pre-school education delivers competitive advantages for our children, our society and our economy and as such lays the foundation stones for recovery and growth into the future.

Occupational Profiles – Setting Standards

Introduction

It is necessary for the future development of the childcare workforce in Ireland that education and training programmes equip practitioners with the essential skills, knowledge and competencies and promote the core values and dispositions necessary for high quality practice. Occupational profiles provide the necessary benchmarks for the development of standards for education and training programmes. This section provides an overview of the development of occupational profiles for the ECCE sector in Ireland and looks at Frameworks of Qualifications in operation, both here and abroad.

Building Occupational Profiles

In 2002, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform conducted an extensive consultation process to discover the scope and nature of occupational profiles in early childhood care and education in Ireland. This exercise culminated in the publication of *Quality Childcare and Lifelong Learning: A Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development* (hereafter referred to as the Model Framework). This publication identified a number of occupational profiles and associated skills/attributes depending on the role of the childcare practitioner. The roles vary from that of Basic Practitioner to Expert Practitioner and are detailed below.

Table 1: Occupational Profiles

Occupational Profile	Intellectual Skills/ Attributes	Processes	Accountability
Basic Practitioner	Elementary understanding of core knowledge areas. Ability to apply solutions to familiar problems. Ability to receive and pass on information.	Ability to carry out routine tasks. Basic competence in a range of clearly defined operations.	Directed activity under supervision. Reliance on external monitoring and quality control.
Intermediate Practitioner	Broad range of core knowledge with some depth. Ability to interpret and reflect on information. Well-developed range of practical skills.	Ability to carry out varied range of tasks in a limited range of different contexts.	Responsibility for own actions under direction. Some responsibility for quality of services within prescribed guidelines.

Occupational Profile	Intellectual Skills/ Attributes	Processes	Accountability
Experienced Practitioner	Broad range of core knowledge with greater depth. Ability to acquire specialist theoretical knowledge in one area. Ability to access, evaluate, compare and interpret information. Well-developed range of skills and ability to employ in complex non-routine situations.	Ability to select from a broad range of skills appropriate to context. Present information to audience.	Operate with full autonomy with broad guidance/evaluation. Responsibility for quality of services in accordance with specified standards. Limited responsibility for work of others.
Advanced Practitioner	In-depth understanding of comprehensive body of knowledge. Expertise in particular area of knowledge. Generate responses, demonstrating some innovation, to challenging situations. Analyse, evaluate and interpret a wide range of information.	Perform effectively in a wide range of contexts involving creative and non-routine activities. Use judgement in planning, selecting or presenting information, methods or resources.	Full autonomy and responsibility for own actions and those of others. Responsibility for meeting required quality standards.
Expert Practitioner	Mastery of complex theoretical knowledge. Ability to critically evaluate knowledge, concepts and practice. Expertise in research, policy development.	Apply diagnostic and creative skills in a wide range of situations. Engage in planning, policy development and management. Engagement in research, publication and dissemination of knowledge and skills.	Complete autonomy in professional activities. Responsibility for achieving personal and group outcomes. Accountability for all decision making.

It was intended that these profiles would inform the development of sectoral standards for awards across all levels of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). However, in 2002, the NFQ was still in the final stages of development and it was not possible to map the occupational profiles onto the different levels of the NFQ. Since then, *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and *Aistear*, the Framework for Early Learning have been developed and provide further clarity regarding the role of the ECCE practitioner. To ensure that the occupational profiles developed in the *Model*

Framework document are still relevant for the purposes of setting sectoral standards for awards, a number of cross referencing exercises were carried out and are reported below.

Mapping of Occupational Profiles to the National Framework of Qualifications

The occupational profiles presented in the *Model Framework* were reviewed by the NQAI and the Awarding Bodies to determine if these profiles were still relevant and to match them with appropriate awards levels in the NFQ. (see *Appendix C*).

The following matches were decided:

Occupational Profile from the Model Framework	NFQ Level	Comment
Basic Practitioner	Level 4	This may need to equate to a major award or the best fit may be to a minor or special purpose award at that level.
Intermediate Practitioner	Level 5	This would generally equate to a major award (FETAC Level 5 Certificate) while it may also equate to a minor or a special purpose award.
Experienced Practitioner	Level 6	This would generally equate to a FETAC Advanced Certificate at Level 6.
Advanced Practitioner	Level 7/8	This would equate to at least an Ordinary Bachelor Degree.
Expert Practitioner	Level 8/9	This would equate to at least an Honours Bachelor Degree.

It was noted that each of the occupational profiles in the *Model Framework* contained a mix of knowledge, skill and competencies from more than one level of the NFQ. For example, there are level 7 and 8 sub-strands in the advanced practitioner profile. The ‘best fit’ approach was taken in mapping the profiles to an NFQ level.

Review of Occupational Profiles

The occupational profiles set out in the *Model Framework* were also reviewed by the CECDE and the NCCA in the light of developments in the sector since 2002. The *Model Framework* describes common occupational descriptors along the parameters of core knowledge, key tasks and responsibilities and skills and knowledge.

The work of the CECDE and the NCCA included a detailed cross referencing between these occupational profiles and the content of *Siolta* and *Aistear*.

Each framework has a clear and specific purpose. The *Model Framework* aspires to inform the development of education and training programmes nationally. *Siolta* aims to develop all facets of quality within ECCE settings and *Aistear* intends to help adults provide appropriately challenging, positive and enjoyable learning experiences for children from birth to six years.

With regard to the targeted age group, all three frameworks focus on children aged birth to six years, although the *Model Framework* does include seven and eight year olds. While all three frameworks are directed towards services providing both care and education, *Síolta* and *Aistear* also support practice in infant classes in the primary school sector while the *Model Framework* does not. A detailed comparative analysis across the three frameworks was carried out using the occupational profile of Advanced Practitioner as it requires the broadest range of skills and competences. This revealed a distinct compatibility between the *Model Framework* occupational profiles and both *Síolta* and *Aistear*. A detailed report on this work is available as a background paper and can be downloaded from www.omc.gov.ie

Findings and Implications for the Workforce Development Plan

A strong degree of synergy is identified across *Síolta*, *Aistear* and the *Model Framework*. Each framework has been developed in close consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and has been endorsed for both its vision and content. Each has been debated and contested in international academic fora and again has won acclaim for the clarity with which they articulate the vision for the future ECCE workforce (Oberhuemer, 2005; OECD, 2006). Finally, each has been closely informed by respected bodies of relevant research and this, together with an intensive consultation process, has ensured that they do, indeed, accurately encompass the range and nature of practice that graduates of education and training courses will be required to engage in now and into the future.

Standards for Education and Training in Early Childhood Care and Education

The immediate implication of this audit exercise is that the *Model Framework* has been authenticated as a relevant representation of the consensus in the ECCE sector regarding occupational profiles. Accompanied by the two practice frameworks, the breadth and depth of practice in ECCE is clearly articulated. The original purpose of the *Model Framework* was to inform the development of sectoral standards for nationally accredited education and training awards at all levels of the NFQ. The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act (Government of Ireland, 1999) places responsibility for this process with the Awarding Bodies, i.e., FETAC, HETAC, the Institutes of Technology (IOT) and the Universities. The development of award standards is already underway within each of the sectors. A particular priority is the development of detailed standards for all FETAC awards.

UK Awards

In the past, UK awards in ECCE have featured prominently when the qualifications profile of the ECCE workforce has been examined. For this reason and also due to the vital role that the recognition of international qualifications has in allowing the Irish labour market to remain flexible and efficient, it is essential that we are able to recognise and compare qualifications acquired abroad with those available in Ireland. UK Awarding Bodies operating in Ireland include CACHE and City and Guilds. Discussions to ensure that the UK quality assurance regulations also apply to recognised UK qualifications in Ireland are completed and many such Awarding Bodies will have new quality assurance arrangements in place in the near future. The agreed cross-referencing of levels of the Irish Framework with those of the UK vocational awards is approximately as follows:

Irish NFQ Level	UK Vocational Awards
1	Entry Level
2	Entry Level
3	Level 1
4	Level 2
5	Level 3
6	Level 4
7	Level 5
8	Level 6
9	Level 7
10	Level 8

Particular types of qualification may be at these levels and the closest comparable one is at a different level in another Framework. For example, the closest comparable awards to a Higher National Diploma at Level 5 in the UK are the Advanced Certificate and Higher Certificate at Level 6 in Ireland. For full details see http://www.qualificationsrecognition.ie/recognition/rec_pro_init/com_qual.html

European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

The eight level EQF is a common European reference framework which links the qualifications systems of EU countries together. It has two principal aims: to promote citizens' mobility between countries and to facilitate their lifelong learning.

The EQF can be used as a reference tool to compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems. The Irish National Framework of Qualifications will remain in its current ten level format and is now in the process of being aligned with the European Framework.

Summary

The development of occupational profiles, associated national awards and alignment with international awards are all important prerequisites for the development of clear professional pathways within the field of early childhood care and education. The work completed in this regard in 2002, resulting in the publication of the *Model Framework*, achieved broad based consensus on occupational profiles and the core knowledge, skills, competencies, values, attitudes and dispositions necessary for fulfilment of these profiles. The mapping and cross-referencing exercises reported on in this section, demonstrate the continued relevance of the 2002 *Model Framework* material for the future development of education and training programmes to ensure an appropriately skilled and qualified workforce in ECCE into the future. It also reinforces the central importance of the establishment of national standards for educational awards in ECCE and for the subsequent review of relevant education and training programmes.

Profile of Current Workforce

Introduction

This section represents a brief overview of a range of data on the current workforce in early childhood care and education (ECCE) in Ireland. The data sources include a special module on childcare which was carried out as part of the Quarterly National Household Survey and the National Skills Database.

Quarterly National Household Survey – Module on Childcare

The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) module on childcare, which took place in the first quarter of 2005, showed that parents or guardians of pre-school children are still the main carers during the normal working day (59.7%). Paid carers (12.1%) and unpaid relatives (11.5%) were the two most popular types of non-parental childcare. One tenth of families used crèche or Montessori as their main type of childcare, while 4.5% used a paid relative with the remaining families using another type of childcare. Employment data (*see Table 2*) would suggest that there has been a steady increase in the numbers employed in the delivery of childcare services since 2005 but data is not available to show how parental usage of out-of-home early childhood care and education services has changed since 2005.

National Skills Database Statistics

Data on people employed in the childcare sector is drawn from the National Skills Database which collates a number of different datasets including employment data which is sourced from the Central Statistics Office. The data includes special needs assistants in the education sector but does not include childminders. Gathering data on the number of people employed as childminders in Ireland is difficult because only a person minding more than three pre-school children from different families is obliged to notify the HSE under the 1991 Childcare Act. Childminders who are not obliged to notify the HSE may choose to do so under the National Voluntary Notification System. At the moment, a total of 455 childminders (POBAL, 2009) have done so, however, this is an understatement of the number of childminders employed in the State.

Employment Classification

Employment data is sourced from the CSO. It comes from the results of the Quarterly National Household Surveys and covers the period 1998-2008. Employment data is occupationally coded and the most relevant occupational titles in relation to childcare are:

SOC	Standard Occupational Classification description ⁶
650	Nursery nurses – provide care for children in day or residential nurseries, children’s homes, maternity units and similar establishments; related job titles: crèche assistant, nursery assistant, nursery nurse.

⁶ The SOC codes and their descriptors are defined by the CSO

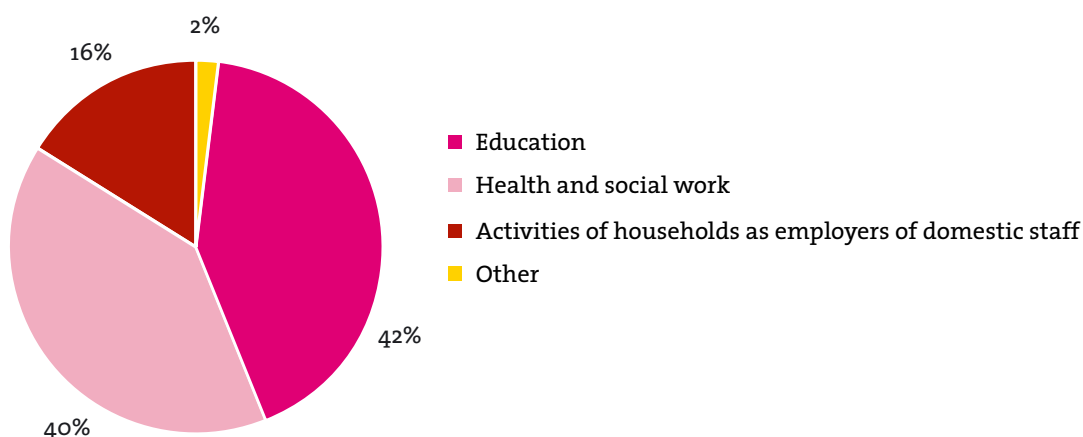
SOC	Standard Occupational Classification description
651	Playgroup leaders – deliver and facilitate play opportunities for children in a range of formal and informal settings including play groups, play schemes, free play locations and after-school activities; related job titles: play leader, playgroup assistant, playgroup leader.
652	Educational/Special Needs assistants – assist teachers with or relieve them of a variety of non teaching duties; related job titles: classroom helper, education care officer, non-teaching assistant, school helper, special needs assistant.
659	Other childcare and related occupations – perform a variety of domestic activities in the day-to-day care of children, and supervise and participate in their play, educational and other activities; related job titles: child minder, children’s nanny, au pair.

It is of note that these classifications cover a number of occupations many of which are directly related to childcare and some of which, such as special needs assistants, are not. It is necessary to undertake the analysis of these groupings together to ensure that sample sizes are large enough and to ensure that all classifications which may include occupations involved in childcare are included. The number of playgroup leaders is relatively small (between 300 and 500). It is, therefore, difficult to accurately profile this occupation using sample data as provided by the Quarterly National Household Survey. In order to minimise sampling errors, nursery nurses and playgroup leaders are grouped in the analysis below. A full report drawn from the Quarterly National Household Survey can be seen at www.omc.gov.ie.

Employment by Sector

Childcare related occupations are employed in the Education, Health and Social Work and Household activities sectors of the economy (Figure 2). Nursery nurses and playgroup leaders are primarily employed in the Health and Social Work sector (74%). Education/special needs assistants are almost exclusively employed in the Education sector. Just over half of those employed in other childcare occupations are in the Health and Social Work sector, 38% are in the Household activities sector and the remainder in Education.

Figure 2. Employment in childcare related occupations by sector, quarter 2 2007



Employment Trend

The number of persons employed in childcare related occupations increased significantly between 1998 and 2008. Employment for the combined total of childcare occupations more than trebled, growing from just over 10,700 in 1998 to 37,700 in 2008. This is an increase of 252% or 13% on average annually. The growth was strongest in the four years since 2005, when in excess of 4,000 additional posts in childcare related occupations were created each year, on average.

Table 2: Employment trend in childcare related occupations,⁷ 1998-2008

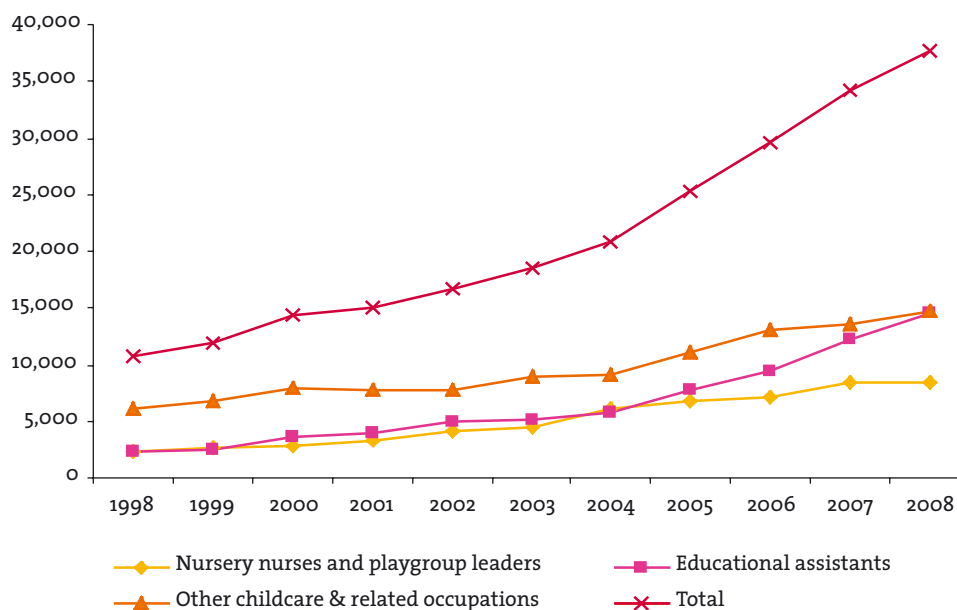
SOC	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	1998-2008 absolute growth	1998-2008 % growth	1998-2008 annualised growth
650+ 651	2300	2600	2800	3300	4100	4500	6100	6700	7100	8500	8400	6100	265%	14%
652	2300	2500	3600	4000	4900	5100	5800	7700	9400	12300	14600	12300	535%	20%
659	6100	6800	8000	7800	7700	8900	9100	11000	13100	13500	14700	8600	141%	9%
Total	10700	11900	14300	15100	16700	18500	20900	25300	29600	34200	37700	27000	252%	13%

Note: The data is rounded to the nearest hundred

Source: CSO, Quarterly National Household Survey

Employment for individual childcare occupations also grew strongly over the period 1998-2008: there was more than a three fold increase in the number of nursery nurses and playgroup leaders combined; the number of other childcare workers more than doubled; the number of education assistants increased six fold.

Figure 3. Employment trend in childcare occupations, 1998-2008



Source: CSO, Quarterly National Household Survey

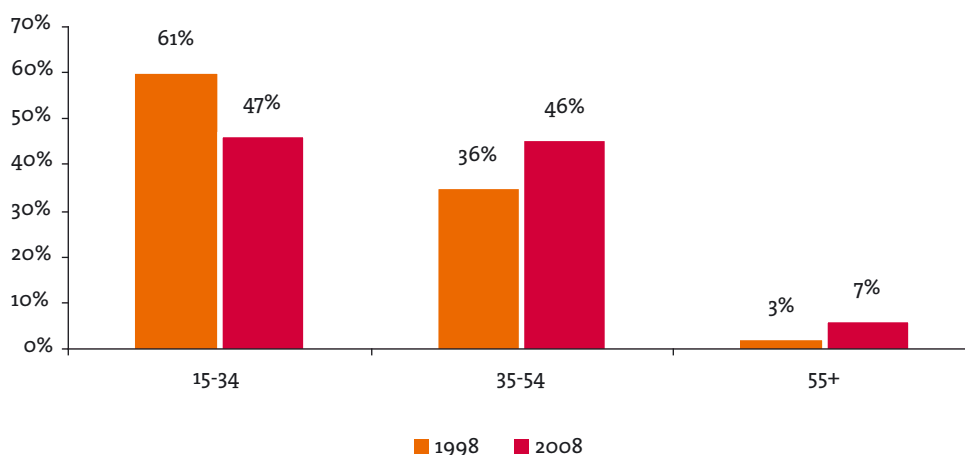
⁷ This figure is inclusive of special needs assistants employed at primary or post primary level

Employment by Age

The age distribution of employment in childcare related occupations is skewed towards younger age cohorts. Almost half of the workforce is younger than 35, while only 7% is older than 55. Over one half of employment in the nursery nurse and playgroup leader category and almost 60% of that in other childcare related occupations is in the 15-34 age cohort. Education/special needs assistants are concentrated in the 35-54 cohort, with more than 60% in this category.

There has been a shift towards older age cohorts in all childcare related occupations, with the share aged 15-34 declining from 61% to 47% between 1998 and 2008.

Figure 4. Employment in childcare related occupations by age, 1998-2008

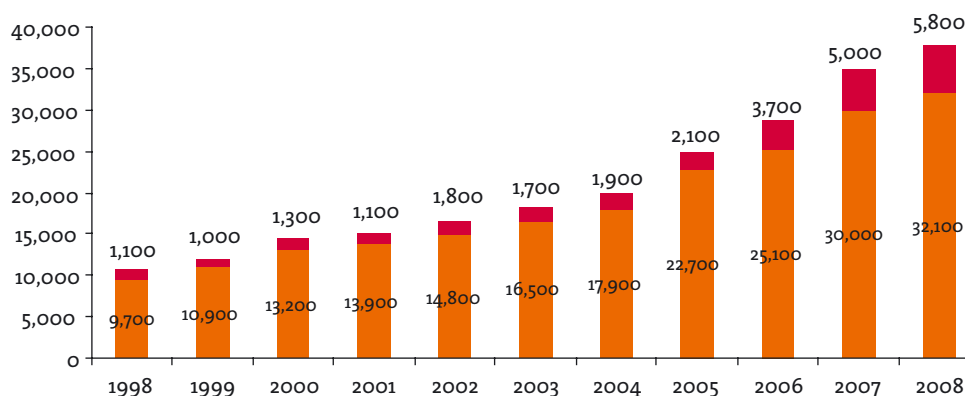


Source: CSO, Quarterly National Household Survey

Employment by Nationality

There has been a continuous inflow of foreign national labour into childcare related occupations. Over the period 1998-2008, the foreign national workforce increased more than five fold, going from 1,100 in 1998 to 5,800 in 2008. Particularly strong increases have been recorded since 2005, with the number of foreign nationals working in childcare related occupations growing by 1,000 on average annually.

Figure 5. Employment in childcare related occupations by nationality, 1998-2008



Source: CSO, Quarterly National Household Survey

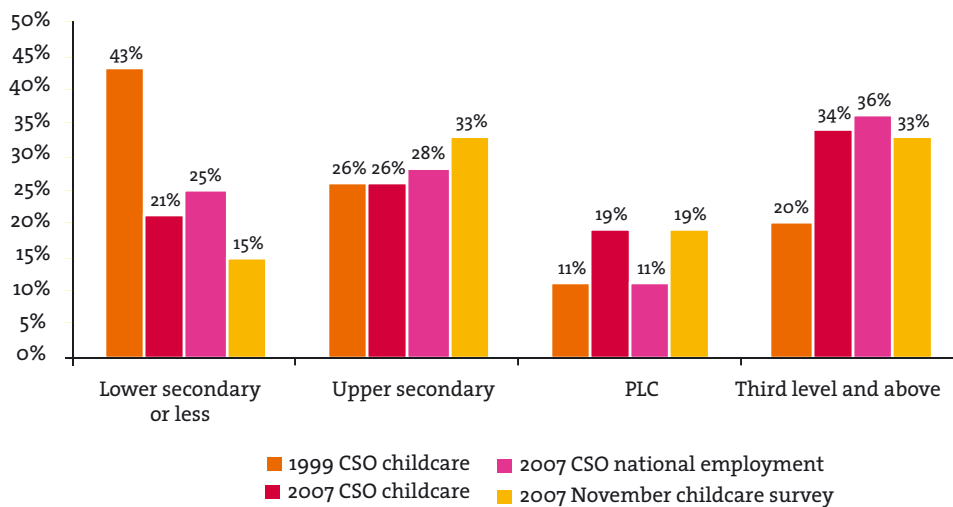
The share of foreign nationals employed in childcare related occupations remained relatively constant at approximately 9-10% between 1998 and 2005; it increased sharply to 13% in 2006 and reached 15% in 2008, which is on a par with the average for the national workforce. Most foreign nationals are employed outside of the crèche sector in other childcare related occupations.

Employment by Highest Education Level Attained

There has been a major shift towards higher education attainment in childcare related employment indicating the level of upskilling that has taken place since 1999. Over the period 1999-2008, the share of childcare employment with post second level education (Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) and third level combined) grew from just under a third to more than a half. Conversely, the share with lower secondary qualifications or less more than halved and accounted for less than a fifth of childcare related employment in 2008. The share of those with upper secondary education remained largely unchanged at just over a quarter.

The education profile of childcare related employment is higher than the national average: one fifth of all childcare workers hold PLC qualifications compared to 11%, nationally. By contrast, the share of childcare workers with lower secondary education or less is smaller than the national average of 25%.

Figure 6. Employment in childcare related occupations by highest education attained



Note: The data on education has been available only since 1999.

Source: CSO, Quarterly National Household Survey and the November 2007 Survey on the childcare sector

Although an improvement in the education distribution of workers in childcare related occupations is evident from 1999, a notable change occurred in 2004 (and has levelled since), which would suggest that the inflow of labour into childcare related occupations from accession states contributed to the improvement of the education profile of the workforce in this area. The data suggests that approximately one half of foreign nationals have third level education. Job opportunities and the absence of a mandatory qualifications requirement in many childcare related occupations may have absorbed some female foreign national labour supply at third level. As a result, the figures may, to some extent, overstate the educational profile of foreign national childcare workers

and that some of the foreign national workforce with third level education hold qualifications in fields not related to childcare.

Immigration

Irish employers in childcare related activities have been increasingly sourcing labour from non-domestic sources. This is illustrated by the continuous and rising inflow of foreign national workers over the last decade (Figure 5).

Most of the increase in the foreign national workforce in childcare related occupations between 2005 and 2008 has come from EU accession countries (1,700 accession state workers out of the total inflow of 2,900).

In addition, there have been a number of workers entering the workforce from non-EU countries. The numbers are small due to the listing of childcare related occupations as ineligible for the receipt of an employment permit and those issued represent exceptions to the qualification rule.

Table 3: New work permits issued for childcare occupations

	Nursery nurses	Playgroup leaders	Educational assistants	Other childcare and related occupations	Total
Feb-07				2	2
Mar-07	2			1	3
Apr-07			1	3	4
May-07				3	3
Jun-07			1	2	3
Jul-07			1	6	7
Aug-07				3	3
Sep-07		1	2	3	6
Oct-07			1	5	6
Nov-07		1		1	2
Dec-07				5	5
Jan-08			1	3	4
Feb-08				3	3
Total	2	2	7	40	51

Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; occupational classification is by the FÁS Skills and Labour Market Research Unit

Validating the Data on the Profile of the Workforce

As the data provided by the National Skills Database is aggregate data drawing together a number of different childcare related occupations, it was considered necessary to validate the data by carrying out a survey of the childcare sector to determine the qualifications level within the sector. The survey was conducted between November 2007 and February 2008 through the City and County Childcare Committees. It achieved an average response rate of 40% with a total of 1,924 centre based services represented in the final results. Data on a total of 8,357 staff was gathered. Using this figure as a basis from which to estimate the total extent of the workforce in centre based early childhood care and education settings would suggest a total workforce of 20,835.

This information helps to validate the CSO statistics on the workforce in childcare related occupations. In 2007, the total workforce in childcare related occupations is reported by the CSO to have been 34,200. The number of special needs assistants (SNAs) employed in 2007 was 9,600 (DES, 2008) and if these are removed from the total, along with the 16% of households as employers of domestic staff, then those working directly in the provision of centre based childcare service can be reasonably estimated at approximately 19,000. If the same logic is applied to the 2008 CSO employment figures, based on a total of 10,442 SNAs in 2008 (DES, 2009) a current workforce of 21,226 can be estimated.

In the main, the November 2007 survey of the educational attainment of the childcare sector supported the data drawn from the National Skills Database. It showed that 41% of staff had achieved a childcare related qualification at Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications, 11% had achieved a Level 6 qualification and 9% had pursued qualifications at Level 7 (bachelors ordinary degree) or higher. Only 12% of the workforce had no formal qualifications at all with the remainder achieving minor awards or awards at Levels 1-4 of the NFQ. The one area where there was a distinct divergence between the National Skills Database data and the November 2007 survey data was the reported number of foreign nationals employed in the sector. The November 2007 survey data reported that only 4% of the workforce were foreign nationals. As this figure differs markedly from the figure of 14% drawn from the QNHS data, other data sources⁸ were interrogated but without establishing definitively the number of foreign nationals employed in the childcare sector. It is, however, more likely that the actual figure is closer to the QNHS figure of 14% than that of 4%. The QNHS data also showed that foreign national workers were more likely to have third level qualifications. This was validated by the November 2007 survey of the childcare sector which showed that non-native English speakers were more likely to have third level qualifications (41%) but that these were unlikely to be ECCE related.

Summary

Providing an accurate profile of the numbers and qualifications profile of individuals employed in delivering early childhood care and education services in Ireland has proven to be a challenging exercise. However, despite the shortcomings of available data, it does provide valuable insight into the fact that over the past ten years, the ECCE workforce has become characterised as increasingly qualified. Investment in the sector has resulted in a situation where CSO data shows that the number of people with lower secondary qualifications or less accounted for a diminishing percentage of the workforce in childcare related employment in 2008.

⁸ Other data sources included the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations.

Supply of Skilled Workers

Introduction

This section looks at the current education and training opportunities available in both Further and Higher Education and Training. It also looks at the regional distribution of provision, particularly at Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) level where most of the Irish education and training in ECCE takes place.

A Diverse Range of Provision

A wide diversity of education and training provision is currently available to the ECCE workforce in Ireland. The level of award on offer usually dictates the type of provider. Programmes leading to awards at levels 6 – 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) are delivered by Universities and Institutes of Technology. Programmes leading to FETAC awards (Levels 1-6) are offered by a range of providers including colleges of further education, private colleges and community and voluntary organisations registered with FETAC as quality assured education and training providers.

It is worth noting that, historically, many ECCE practitioners accessed education and training through private colleges that offered international (and their own) awards/certification. These include curriculum training such as Montessori, High/Scope and Steiner. In addition, a number of membership organisations and special interest groups have offered courses in a range of areas including Irish language education, working with gifted children and special educational needs training.

National Higher Level Awards in ECCE

With the exception of St. Nicholas Montessori College Modular Degree programme, third level education in ECCE is primarily offered as centre based full time courses of study. Table 4 details all current national higher level courses.⁹

Table 4: Higher level courses in ECCE in Ireland

Institution	Course Title	Level of Award	Duration	Delivery	Commencement date
NUI Cork	Bachelor of Arts (BA) Degree (Honours) in Early Childhood Studies	8	Three years	Full time	1995
Cork Institute of Technology	BA in Early Childhood Care and Education	7	Three years	Full time	2005

⁹ Since the launch of the National Framework of Qualifications in 2003, the title diploma (at undergraduate level) is no longer used and courses corresponding to this level are now referred to as ordinary bachelor degree

Institution	Course Title	Level of Award	Duration	Delivery	Commencement date
Institute of Technology Carlow	BA (Honours) in Early Childhood Education and Care	8	Three years	Full time	2003
Dundalk Institute of Technology	BA (Honours) in Early Childhood Studies	8	Four Years	Full time	2006
Dublin Institute of Technology	BA (Honours) in Early Childhood Education	8	Three Years	Full time	2005 ¹⁰
Letterkenny Institute of Technology	BSc in Early Childhood Care, Health and Education	7	Three Years	Full time	2007
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick	BA in Early Childhood Care and Education	8	Four Years	Full time	2003
Sligo Institute of Technology	BA in Early Childhood Education	8	Four Years	Full time	2006
Institute of Technology Tralee	BA (Honours) in Early Childhood Care and Education	8	Four Years	Full time	2005
Waterford Institute of Technology	BA (Honours) in Early Childhood Studies	8	Three Years	Full Time	2006
St. Nicholas Montessori College, Dublin	BA in Montessori Education	7	Three Years	Full Time	2005 ¹¹
	BA in Montessori Education ACCS mode	7	Modular up to 5 years	Part-time	2005
	BA (Honours) in Montessori Education	8	One Year (add on)	Full Time	2005 ¹²

¹⁰ The Dublin Institute of Technology offered a Level 7 ECCE programme from 1999 to 2005. Some graduates from this programme completed a conversion course and were subsequently awarded a Level 8 qualification.

¹¹ St Nicholas Montessori College offered a Level 7 National Diploma in Humanities in Montessori Education from 1994 to 2005. This National Diploma was also offered by modular ACCS mode over the same period.

¹² St Nicholas Montessori College offered a Level 8 BA in Humanities in Montessori Education from 1997 to 2005.

Participation in Higher Level Courses

As indicated in the Central Applications Office (CAO) data presented in Table 5, the provision and uptake of ECCE related third level courses has increased steadily since 2002: over the period 2002-2007, the number of students accepting places on childcare courses rose from just over 100 to in excess of 500.

Table 5: ECCE courses: CAO acceptances

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Level 7 (Ordinary bachelor degree/ national diploma)				41	27	59
Level 8 (Honours bachelor degree)	113	219	270	249	386	453
Total	113	219	270	290	386	512

Enrolments

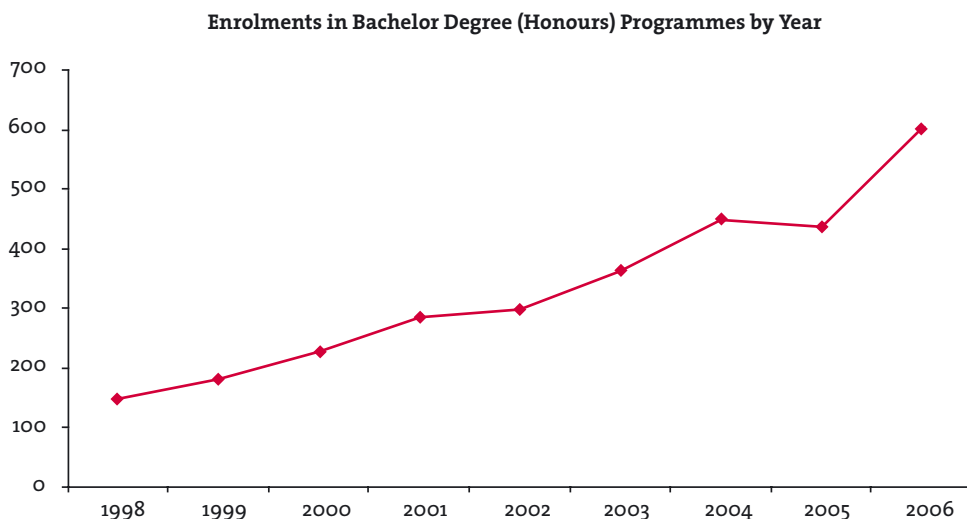
The data shows that there has been a steady increase in the number of students on third level ECCE programmes since 1998. Over the period 1998-2007, enrolments rose from just over 200 to 1,280. The vast majority of enrolments were for honours degree level programmes, which made up 90% of all enrolments in 2007.

Table 6: ECCE courses: enrolments by type of award

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Certificate	47	11								
Diploma/ Ordinary/ Honours Degree	162	195	227	286	298	361	449	743	729	1259
Masters/ Postgraduate Diploma		2						2	23	21
Total	209	208	227	286	298	361	449	745	752	1,280

Note: figures represent the cumulative totals of all students enrolled on a programme in each academic year irrespective of how many years they have already completed.

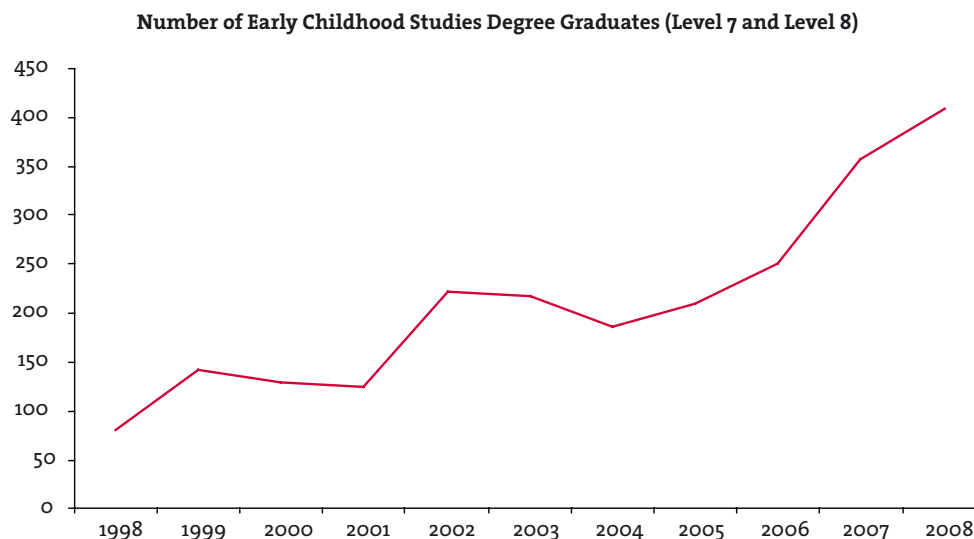
Figure 7. Increase in Bachelor Degree (Honours) programmes in ECCE studies by year



ECCE Courses – Graduates (Levels 7 and 8) 1998 - Present

Figure 8 demonstrates the increase in the number of third level graduates in ECCE related degree programmes (Levels 7 and 8) in the past decade. Whilst this data is incomplete,¹³ it still shows that there has been a steady rise in numbers. Given that several new degree programmes have come on stream (see Table 4) in recent years, this rise is set to continue into the future.

Figure 8. ECCE graduates at Level 7 & 8



Figures 7 and 8 demonstrate the consistent growth in yearly enrolments and graduations at Levels 7 and 8 in ECCE related programmes from 1998. This increase coincides with the availability of such programmes in early childhood related areas. This has primarily arisen due to the increasing number of Institutes of Technology developing courses. While data on the destination of graduates from most of these courses is not yet available, it will be interesting to observe whether the experience of longer established programmes (e.g., University College Cork), where students move out of early childhood practice into other areas such as primary teaching, is repeated. As with employment data, the education data shows that ECCE is primarily a female profession, with a negligible number of male students on ECCE related programmes at all levels.

There is little evidence of flexibility in the delivery of degree programmes in ECCE. The vast majority are offered on a full time basis. It would also appear that the majority of those enrolled on these programmes are traditional entrants coming in following the Leaving Certificate. While most courses do offer places to mature students, data from the Higher Education Authority (HEA) would indicate that an average of 9.5% of participants on full time courses in early childhood care and education are over 23 years of age (HEA, 2007/8 enrolment figures in Honours Degrees in Early Childhood Studies). Given the assertion in the *Model Framework* document that ‘Flexible routes to education, training and qualifications will be essential within the ECCE sector to enable future growth and development’ (DJELR, 2002:28), it would appear that there is still much work to be done in this regard.

¹³ Dublin Institute of Technology was unable to provide complete datasets on graduates.

Further Education and Training Provision

While the provision of Higher Level awards in ECCE in Ireland is relatively straightforward to depict, the same cannot be said of Further Education and Training. A broad range of providers are involved in the delivery of courses leading to FETAC awards. Whilst the majority of provision is accounted for by the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and by FÁS, the National Training Authority, a number of private and community and voluntary organisations are also involved. The majority of courses have been developed to enable students to achieve FETAC Level 5 or Level 6 major awards. It would appear from the available data that there is great diversity in the delivery of these courses, e.g., duration can vary from 480 to 800 hours for a full time course in a VEC leading to a FETAC Level 5 major award. Flexible delivery mechanisms are more apparent at this level of awards. FÁS have developed innovative work based training programmes that allow learners to combine work with study (see detailed descriptions below). Learners can also accumulate minor component awards over time leading to the achievement of a major award. The geographical distribution of VEC course provision and the variation in duration can be seen from Figures 9 and 10.

Figure 9: Number of VEC one year courses by Regional Area and NFQ Level (2007)



Source: Further Education Section, Department of Education and Science

Two year courses

As can be seen from Figure 10, there are two regions, the West and Midlands, which have no two year childcare courses. The South-West and Dublin have the highest number, with six each. There are relatively few two year courses offered at Level 6, with most regions not offering any two year courses at this level.

Figure 10: VEC two year courses by Regional Area and FETAC Level



Source: Further Education Section, Department of Education and Science

Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) Courses

There has been a major increase in the uptake of PLC courses in childcare since 2002. Table 8 shows enrolments in *Community and health – childcare* courses over the period 1997-2008. In 2008, the total number enrolled was over 3,500, almost three times the level in 2000.

Table 8: PLC courses enrolment

Year	Programme year			
	1	2	3	Total
1997	1,022	191	0	1,213
1998	1,019	274	0	1,293
1999	884	219	0	1,103
2000	940	172	0	1,112
2001	1,124	183	0	1,307
2002	1,791	158	19	1,968
2003	2,327	379	0	2,706
2004	2,398	405	0	2,803
2005	2,601	359	0	2,960
2006	2,840	287	0	3,127
2007	2,741	420	0	3,161
2008 ¹⁴				3,567

Source: Further Education Section, Department of Education and Science

¹⁴ Breakdown by year of study not available for 2008, however 367 of the total enrolment was for the Childcare Supervisor (code 656) course.

FÁS Initiatives – ‘One Step Up’

‘One Step Up’ is the FÁS response to the report of the Enterprise Strategy Group *Ahead of the Curve, Ireland’s place in the global economy*. It aims to encourage employee training, to increase employee competency levels and to promote an ethos of lifelong learning in the workplace.

‘One Step Up’ is an over arching concept that is reflected in a wide range of FÁS programmes and initiatives which are designed to assist persons in employment to build on their competency levels and to obtain a recognised qualification within the NFQ.

For example, the **Competency Development Programme (CDP)** provides financial support for training of employees at various skill levels and across a range of sectors including childcare.

Priority is given to the development of management skills in the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) sector and also to the provision of portable, certified qualifications for lower skilled workers. In 2008, the CDP invested a total of €514,794 in specific childcare training for 443 participants throughout the country.

In addition FÁS supported employees through the ‘**Skills for Work /Workplace Basic Education Fund**’. These programmes were designed to assist employees with literacy or numeracy difficulties to function more effectively in their workplace.

FÁS – National Traineeship Programme

The FÁS National Traineeship Programme is an occupational skills development programme which combines formal training with FÁS and workplace coaching with an employer. The training content and occupational standards for all traineeships are based on consultation with employers, trade unions, regulatory bodies and interest groups.

Traineeships are aimed at new labour market entrants and unemployed persons. The minimum age for participation on a Traineeship Programme is the statutory school leaving age.

The Childcare Practitioner Traineeship aims to provide training and qualifications for persons seeking employment in the childcare sector.

Table 9 presents training programmes in childcare provided by FÁS in 2008. All FÁS childcare courses are FETAC accredited. The Childcare Supervisor course is currently under review and the revised course will place greater emphasis on management skills, compliance with Regulations and quality in childcare provision.

Table 9: Childcare: FÁS training provision

Training Programmes	2008
Childcare practitioner traineeship	381 *
Local Training Initiatives	121 **
CDP	443
Total	945

* Throughput

** In training

With specific reference to childcare, FÁS supports:

- Childcare owner/manager development programmes aimed at improving management competencies in the sector.
- Certificate in Training and Continuing Education.
- The development of essential IT skills for owners, managers and childcare workers.
- Training of the trainers – encourages trainers within the childcare sector to obtain the NUI Certificate in Training and Continuing Education.
- IT skills – new initiative to focus on the development of standard IT skills for owners, managers and childcare workers.

Community Employment

In 2008, the number of childcare projects ring-fenced in Community Employment (CE) accounted for 1,760 places; childcare projects in the Dublin region made up 856 places. The Individual Learner Plan, piloted in FÁS Community Employment from early 2006, enables CE Supervisors and participants to identify the training and development needs of each participant and to review participants' progress. It also provides a stage-by-stage structure for planning, implementing, reviewing and recording all of the learning activities undertaken by CE participants, including childcare training.

FETAC Major Awards

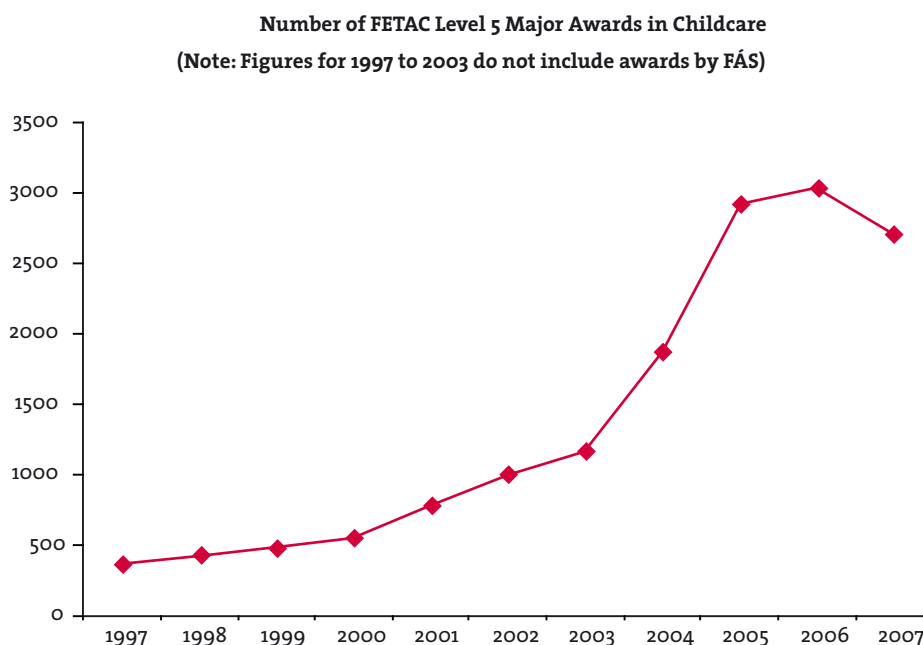
Table 10 shows the numbers who attained a FETAC Major award from 2005 to 2007. The highest concentration of awards is made at Level 5 with a small but incremental growth in Level 6 awards. With the exception of 2004, Level 4 awards do not feature significantly.

Table 10: Number of FETAC Major Awards in Childcare

Course Title	FETAC Level	2004	2005	2006	2007
Childcare Assistant or childcare support	4	40	31	6	9
Childcare or childcare practitioner	5	1,874	2,925	3,037	2,704
Childcare Supervisor	6	94	204	141	213

Figure 11 traces the growth in achievement of NCVA Level 2 (preceding equivalent national award) and FETAC Level 5 Awards. It is noteworthy that sustained growth in these awards coincided with the commencement of the regulation of pre-school services despite the fact that staff qualifications were not specified in the Regulations. Additionally, a sharp rise in Level 5 awards coincides with the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme and the availability of increased funding. This rise may also have been influenced by the increase in the numbers of special needs assistants employed in primary schools.

Figure 11. Growth in major awards in childcare 1997 - 2007



Summary

A wide variety of education and training providers are involved in the delivery of courses for the ECCE workforce. The dominant provision is that delivered by the VEC sector which has trebled in size in the past decade. This provision is generally full time, centre based and focused on FETAC Levels 5 and 6. More recently, flexible delivery mechanisms have begun to emerge with FÁS taking the initiative in this regard. Community and Voluntary sector and private college provision still play an important role in delivering, not only FETAC accredited courses, but also short courses and continuing professional development specific to demands from the workforce. Higher Level education and training provision has also experienced substantial growth and development with a total of eight IOTs currently offering bachelor degree or post graduate programmes in ECCE.

State Investment in Training within the ECCE Sector

State investment in training within the ECCE sector can be broadly divided into work-based training and to the funding of Further and Higher Education.

Work based training - FÁS

Expenditure on work-based training by FÁS includes delivery of the Traineeship programme, local training initiatives, Competency Development Programmes and the Community Employment (CE) scheme. Expenditure includes childcare allowances for those participating in courses. Of the total expenditure for 2008, €25.7m was spent on the CE scheme.

Table 11: FÁS Childcare Expenditure 2008

Training Courses/Schemes	Region	Jan - Dec 2008 Expenditure (€m)
Traineeships	Dublin Region	1.314
	South East	0.241
	South West	0.648
	Mid West	0.421
	West	0.183
	North East	0.511
	Midlands	0.709
	North West	0.425
	Total for Traineeships	
CDP		0.515
Total Jan – Dec 2008		4.967
Local Training Initiatives	Midlands	0.238
	South East	1.292
	South West	0.289
Total LTI		1.819
Community Employment		25.7
Childcare Allowance		4.958
Total Jan – December 2008		37.444

Skillnets

Skillnets is an enterprise-led support body dedicated to the promotion and facilitation of learning as a key element in sustaining Ireland's national competitiveness.

Skillnets' strategy is to support companies from all sectors in the economy to engage in training, but does so exclusively through networks of companies. This approach allows companies to achieve economies of scale, increase efficiency, lower costs and provide training that is more relevant to individual sectors or types of companies.

Skillnets is funded by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment from the resources of the National Training Fund. A recent training development in the childcare sector has been the launch of the NCNA¹⁵ Childcare Skillnet. It is a network of 31 private childcare providers whose objectives are to improve the standards of care and education offered by their services through the professional development of their staff.

It is intended that Skillnet will facilitate members by offering specific training programmes which are FETAC accredited.

Further Education and Training – VEC Provision

VECs are the main providers of PLC based courses which account for the majority of FETAC Level 4, 5 and 6 awards, both major and minor. Table 12 details the expenditure on childcare courses over the period 2000 – 2008

Table 12: PLC course expenditure 2000 - 2008

Year	PLC Childcare enrolment	Total cost of enrolment	Cost per student
2000	1,112	3,714,041.08	3,339.97
2001	1,307	4,746,069.89	3,631.27
2002	1,968	7,707,612.96	3,916.47
2003	2,706	11,677,418.28	4,315.38
2004	2,803	12,690,946.89	4,527.63
2005	2,960	14,038,924.80	4,742.88
2006	3,127	15,336,778.01	4,904.63
2007	3,164	16,152,330.68	5,105.03
2008	3,567		

Source: Further Education Section, Department of Education and Science

Community and Voluntary Sector funded under NCIP

Since 2000, funding has been made available through the City and County Childcare Committees (CCC) and the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations (NVCOs)¹⁶ for training of staff in childcare settings. In 2009, a total of €249,674 has been allocated to the 33 CCCs and €118,871 to 9 NVCOs. This funding level has remained fairly consistent over the life of the EOCP and NCIP. It has facilitated a broad range of activities in support of improving the qualifications profile of the established workforce in ECCE. These include short professional practice courses (e.g., First Aid training, Child Protection), training seminars and FETAC accredited training programmes.

¹⁵ National Children’s Nurseries Association

¹⁶ The National Voluntary Childcare Organisations in receipt of funding for professional development and childcare training include; Barnardos, Border County Childcare Network, Childminding Ireland, Fobairt Naionraí Teoranta, Irish Pre-school Playgroups Association, St. Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland, Irish Steiner Kindergarten Association and the National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative (an umbrella organisation made up of members of all NVCO)

Higher Education and Training¹⁷

There are two elements of State expenditure per third level student, the core grant to the institution and a grant in lieu of fees. This varies between the Universities and the IOTs. Indicative costs per institution are shown in Table 13.

Table 13: Higher education costs¹⁸

Institute	Fee	Grant	Total per student	Indicative Total Cost
University (Based on UCC Level 8 in Early Childhood Studies)	€4,695 (2008/2009)	€5,376 (includes a premium of 1.3)	€10,071	€3.02m
IOT Level 7	€1,454 (2008/2009)		€10,135 (includes a unit cost per student of €8,681 (2005/2006 figures))	€1.07m
IOT Level 8	€2,319 (2008/2009)		€11,000 (includes the above unit cost per student)	€9.38m

Summary

State funding of education and training provision in ECCE has risen sharply in the past decade. This funding is channelled through a number of providers, but, in general, it can be characterised as either capitation funding for the institution or grant aid to the student. In the main, funding is directed to support full time course provision and full time students.

¹⁷ Note that this does not necessarily represent institutional expenditure on these courses, merely State expenditure. The internal allocation of funds is a matter for each institution.

¹⁸ Figures are based on an enrolment of 300 students in UCC; 106 students at Level 7 and 853 students at Level 8 in the IOTs

Demand for Education and Training Courses

Introduction

The demand for education and training courses in ECCE can be viewed from two particular standpoints. Firstly, demand is conditional upon labour market requirements for qualified ECCE workers and secondly, demand will be influenced by aspiring or established ECCE practitioners who either want to gain pre-service or in-service qualifications.

Labour Market Demand

Based upon CSO statistics, the childcare related occupations in Ireland have increased by 13% each year since 1998. While the current economic situation is likely to impact on this phenomenal growth rate, a workforce development plan has to take into account the projected demand for ECCE workers in the short and medium term. This projected demand will also be influenced by national policy commitments to the provision of early childhood services.

Projected Demand

The future demand for childcare workers can be divided into two components: replacement demand and expansion demand.

Replacement demand¹⁹

Replacement demand arises due to the requirement to replace workers who leave due to retirement, illness or exit from the occupation. A study on replacement flows at occupational level was conducted by FÁS and the ESRI several years ago and the results published in their Manpower Forecasting Study Report 9 in April 2000. Their estimate of the replacement rate for childcare workers is 3.9%. This means that for the current employment level of approximately 21,226 persons (based on the disaggregated CSO figures), roughly 830 workers will be needed annually to replace those who leave. The National Children's Nurseries Association (NCNA), however, have reported that a recent survey of their membership indicates that annual turnover rate is actually 15%. If this scenario is accepted then the replacement demand for workers within this sector would be over 3,000.

Expansion demand

In the current economic circumstances it is very difficult to estimate expansion demand for the ECCE sector for the next three years. While the working group reviewed estimates based on the ESRI medium term review (2008) and the approach adopted in the National Skills Strategy, the outcomes from these estimates are very ambitious in the current economic climate. Nonetheless, employment in this sector has expanded significantly to the period up until early 2008. The study on future skills needs in the sector which is to be completed by Summer 2009 will provide further estimates for consideration.

¹⁹ Analysis carried out by the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit of FÁS

Workforce demand

The second influence on the demand for education and training programmes is the desire of potential and actual workers to participate in courses. It is evident from the data included in this report, that a process of upskilling has been taking place across the ECCE workforce since 2000. Establishing the potential nature of this demand into the future can be estimated by factoring the outcomes of the survey data and the CSO employment data against the current population of workers. Influencing the demand for education and training are the current workforce in the ECCE sector who are unqualified. This represents between 12% and 20% of the total employed in the ECCE sector and would suggest that of the current workforce of 21,226, somewhere between 2,500 and 4,250 workers are unqualified.

A further source of demand will emerge from the pre-school initiative announced in the April 2009 budget as pre-school Leaders will be expected to acquire an NFQ Level 6 qualification by 2012. There is also a demand based on the requirement to upskill the existing workforce as appropriate according to their roles and responsibilities. This is not so easily quantified and would necessitate a more detailed survey to establish the education and training needs of the current workforce.

Summary

The growth in the ECCE workforce in Ireland has been rapid and unprecedented in the past decade. This has undoubtedly been fuelled by State investment in childcare infrastructure and growth in the economy. Data on the nature of this workforce shows an increase in the qualifications profile with a higher percentage of the workforce achieving PLC or higher qualifications. Forecasting the future education and training needs of the ECCE workforce, however, presents a challenge particularly in the current fluctuating economic environment. In general terms, however, it can be concluded that the demand will be influenced by the needs of new entrants to the workforce and also by those already in the workforce who are unqualified or who wish to progress to higher levels of qualification. The ECCE sector has continued potential for employment growth in the long term and this, in conjunction with continued commitment by the established workforce for continued upskilling, would appear to indicate that the demand for education and training in ECCE will be sustained over the long term.

Access to, and effective participation in education and training

Introduction

This section of the report provides an overview of some of the central issues related to access to and effective participation in programmes of education and training. In the ECCE sector there are multiple challenges due to the percentage of unqualified or under-qualified staff and the complex needs of the existing and potential workforce. Combining work, family and education and training commitments is a challenge for the established ECCE workforce and a broad range of supports will be necessary to ensure equitable participation for all those endeavouring to take up the challenge of raising their qualifications profile.

Facilitating Life Long Learning

The White Paper on Adult Education (2000) addressed the wider issue of realising, within our education system, a lifelong learning agenda which is described as a:

“..relatively seamless progression through an educational continuum from cradle to grave, with open boundaries between the worlds of home/work/education and provision for flexibility in learning sources.” (White Paper on Adult Education, 2000: 30)

Since then, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) has taken a lead role in co-ordinating the cultural changes required to support the achievement of its objectives for access and effective participation. As part of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), the NQAI established policies, actions and procedures in relation to the key objective of promoting and facilitating access and effective participation for learners. The policies also incorporated objectives for a national approach to credit. In carrying out this work, the NQAI has worked closely with the Awards Councils, whose function it is to ensure that the procedures set down for access and effective participation are implemented by providers.

The NQAI has also published principles and operational guidelines in relation to a national approach to the use of credit in higher education in 2004. Following a consultative process, the NQAI has also established principles and operational guidelines for the application of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

Practitioners in ECCE in Ireland have participated, over time, in a diverse range of education and training programmes. In addition, many practitioners have gained skills and knowledge through their experience rather than through formal training programmes. As is apparent from the recent workforce survey, a considerable number of experienced workers in the sector are at a disadvantage, in terms of advancement within the profession, due to their lack of formal qualifications. The challenge now is to ensure that there are flexible ways for people to obtain qualifications and to build on these qualifications.

Major awards can be attained by means of a series of FETAC minor component awards leading to a major award. Courses leading to awards are provided across a range of different providers including, in particular, FÁS and the Vocational Education

Committees (VECs). The FETAC system is effectively a credit system whereby an individual can attain a series of minor awards building up to a major award. The comprehensiveness of the FETAC system is being increased through the setting of new Framework standards in the ECCE sector and this will enable a range of more standardised minor awards over time.

Within higher education, semesterisation and modularisation allows students greater flexibility in accumulating credits. The implementation of a credit system enabled by the NFQ and in line with the ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) is underway.

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)

ECTS is a student-centred system based on the student workload required to achieve the objectives of a programme, in a manner consistent with learning outcomes. While a national approach in being implemented, there is no central definition of credits which gives rise to different mixes of credit units in different institutions. Within individual institutions, credit accumulation works well but between institutions, the different programme providers have to agree on the transfer of credits. In theory, a student can transfer to a different institution having already accumulated credits towards a third level qualification. This can mean, for example, that a student transferring into year 2 of a course may have missed out on modules that were covered in year 1 on the new course but had not yet been covered in year 1 on the old course. The relatively small number of higher level institutions offering course in ECCE may offer an opportunity to establish consensus regarding the operation of ECTS in this field.

There are also challenges with progression to higher education awards for holders of FETAC awards. The Institutes of Technology have a system-wide approach to the recognition of FETAC awards at Levels 5 and 6 for entry to their undergraduate programmes at the start of the programme (Higher Education Links Scheme). However, there is no common practice of exemptions for holders of the FETAC Advanced Certificate. In the university sector, there is a much smaller range of undergraduate courses and the progression arrangements are more difficult. Part-time options leading to higher education qualifications are also very limited.

A more systemised approach to credit for those seeking to commence undergraduate courses with the FETAC Level 6 Advanced Certificate might be explored as could more systemised credit transfer agreements for courses in ECCE among all higher education institutions. This is relevant for all sectors. Public information also needs to be made available about the progression routes and the availability of options for credit accumulation and transfer.

Flexible Learning

The term 'flexible learning' denotes an approach that is based on accessibility and variety, where the learner or provider is able to vary pace, mode, content or location of learning. The principles of flexible learning inform many contemporary professional development programmes (especially within the health care sector) and have been identified as follows:

- Centrality of the learner, whose confidence is developed by removing barriers in learning

- Recognition that profitable learning takes place in many situations
- Variety in mode, location and delivery of professional development opportunities
- Application to practice, encouraging consolidation of learning wherever achieved.

In order to benefit fully from participation in flexible programmes, any credits gained in one setting should be capable of transfer to others. For this to be realised, agreement on a national credit system is an essential prerequisite. Flexible routes to education, training and qualifications will be essential within the ECCE sector to enable future growth and development.

Work-based Learning

The workplace is a key setting where learning takes place. The shortage of continuing professional development opportunities within the workplace represents a barrier to personal professional growth for the individual. It is a stated policy aim that flexible education and training options will be progressed, allied with a focus on addressing barriers to participation of those in the workplace in ongoing education and training. Work-based learning has been identified within the ECCE sector as a valuable mechanism for overcoming barriers to access. The work of FÁS in this area has enhanced the availability of work-based training options for the workforce. Skillnets, as discussed previously, also has potential for work-based training.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

The concept of lifelong learning indicates that learning should encompass the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Learning occurs in many contexts that include work, involvement in social and community activities, or learning through life experience generally. In order to enable the individual to learn throughout life, equal value should be given to all these forms of learning regardless of source, how it is achieved or when in life it is achieved. A major objective of the NFQ is to recognise all learning achievements. It aims to do this by supporting the development of alternative pathways to qualifications (or awards) and by promoting the recognition of prior learning.

The NQAI established principles and operational guidelines for the recognition of prior learning in 2005. The operational guidelines give an exemplar of the nature of the arrangements that further and higher education and training awarding bodies and providers should consider putting in place for the recognition of prior learning (NQAI, 2005).

Recognition is a process by which prior learning is formally identified, assessed and acknowledged. This makes it possible for an individual to build on learning achieved and be formally rewarded for it. Prior learning may have been acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal routes.

The NQAI has set out the purposes of the recognition of prior learning as follows:

- entry to a programme leading to an award
- credit towards an award or exemption from some programme requirements
- eligibility for a full award

In addition, the recognition of prior learning can also be directly relevant in terms of facilitating employment. While there is not necessarily a direct link with qualifications in such recognition, this is a very important dimension to the recognition of prior learning.

The national principles for the recognition of prior learning are addressed to education and training providers, Awarding Bodies, and those in the workplace. The principles are available to those who are developing systems of recognition of prior learning and to those who wish to make use of the prior learning that has been recognised by other providers or Awarding Bodies.

Recognition of prior learning in the ECCE sector

Between 1995 and 2000, Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) procedures, developed as part of the OMNA²⁰ project, enabled experienced ECCE practitioners to gain a number of credits towards a national award. In the process of gathering evidence of learning to earn these credits, learners were also able to identify gaps in their skills and knowledge and access appropriate learning programmes or self-directed learning strategies to enable them to meet the standards for the remaining modules required for the qualification. (See details on APL pilot project for ECCE workers in Co. Clare, reported in OMNA, 2000.)

The existing profile of the workforce in the childcare sector would indicate that there is potential for learning programmes to be developed by providers leading to the attainment of a Level 5 qualification which have extensive elements of the recognition of prior learning. There may also be potential for the recognition of prior learning to be built into programmes leading to qualifications at higher levels. In both cases, there would be enhanced effectiveness where there are groups of learners with similar experiences seeking recognition of prior learning. There should be good potential for this in the sector.

FETAC has a policy of encouraging providers to offer RPL to facilitate access to programmes, exemptions within programmes and access to awards. In 2007, FETAC concluded a pilot project in RPL with a small number of providers where 50 learners achieved major and minor awards in a range of fields including childcare. More recently FETAC has put in place arrangements for providers to facilitate learners to achieve awards through RPL. This can include providers in the ECCE sector who have sufficient resources to support RPL.

In 2006, HETAC published the *Recognition Policy, Criteria and Process for Direct Applications to HETAC for a named Award* and subsequently has granted three awards directly to learners on the basis of RPL. HETAC has also developed an overall policy for providers in experiential learning. It is currently refining this policy and the approach to direct applications for awards in the light of experience. Providers who offer programmes leading to HETAC awards have a responsibility to facilitate RPL for learners. These include the Institutes of Technology and private colleges. Most Institutes of Technology have adopted or are operating RPL based on HETAC policy and the national RPL policy and guidelines.

²⁰ The OMNA Project was established in 1995 with funding from the New Opportunities for Women European Initiative. Its remit was to develop Accreditation of Prior Learning systems in early childhood care and education in Ireland.

OECD review

Ireland has been participating in an OECD activity on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. A national report was drafted in 2006/2007 by the NQAI with the assistance of an Advisory Group and, in particular, with HETAC and FETAC. The aim of the report was to document and review the current situation in Ireland regarding the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning. Following this, an OECD review team visited in February 2008 and its report was published in December 2008. Following the completion of the OECD review, a national action plan for the Recognition of Prior Learning is being developed.

Learner Engagement

Another dimension to facilitating access and effective participation in courses relates to supporting learners' engagement in education and training programmes. The 2002 *Model Framework* highlighted the diversity of learners that characterise the ECCE sector in Ireland. Many staff currently employed in service provision will have to face personal and professional challenges if they wish to take up an offer of education and training. The OMNA Project (OMNA 2000) reported that many of those participating in their Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) processes were "...those who may never have entered the formal education system post school and are now allowed a 'second chance.'" (p.62). The survey reported here demonstrates that there are still a sizeable number of the current ECCE workforce who may be in this situation. The challenges of returning to education and training for such learners may include literacy, self esteem and confidence related issues.

On a more practical level, combining full time work, family life and learning is a daunting prospect for any learner. Flexibility in terms of delivery of courses is essential. Work based learning, RPL and modularisation of courses all have a role to play in this regard. For employers, the issue of finding substitute cover for staff participating on courses may be a difficulty. Financial pressures may also play a role. ECCE is acknowledged as a low wage employment sector and participation on unsubsidised education and training programmes may be beyond the reach of many of the ECCE workforce. This is particularly relevant for those who wish to progress to higher level educational programmes. Part-time degree courses are generally not State funded. This policy approach may act as a disincentive for educational institutions to provide more flexible alternatives to the delivery of courses. Grant aid to the learner is also tied in to full time courses which militates against participation in part-time courses.

Retention of a Qualified Workforce

There are also challenges if qualified staff are to be retained within the ECCE sector. Unqualified workers who gain qualifications often move out of ECCE into other areas of employment because of better salaries and conditions of employment. University College Cork (UCC) reports that a minority of graduates from the BA (Honours) in Early Childhood Studies go on to work in ECCE services. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that the UCC experience is not unique. Low wages and low status have been cited in both national and international reports to explain this phenomenon (ADM, 2003; OECD, 2006). If the Workforce Development Plan is to be effective in improving the qualifications profile of the ECCE sector in Ireland, efforts will have to be made to address the attractiveness of professional employment in this field.

Summary

The achievement of the objectives of the Workforce Development Plan will be dependent on a broad range of factors not least of which are procedures to facilitate access, effective participation and progression for learners. The key challenge is to put in place a broad range of learning opportunities to meet the needs of those already working in the ECCE sector and those seeking to enter it. Additionally, the challenge of attracting and retaining staff in employment in the ECCE sector must be recognised and addressed if the initiatives contained within the Workforce Development Plan are to have sustained impact into the future.

Summary and Conclusions

Introduction

This section of the report draws together the implications of the review of policy, practice and research and the primary data presented in preceding chapters. It highlights the challenges and key questions that the proposed Workforce Development Plan must address in the pursuit of the expressed goal of providing a suitable workforce for the future delivery of quality early childhood care and education services for children in Ireland in the immediate and longer term future.

Changing Practice Environments

The current ECCE workforce has developed historically in response to a diverse range of needs for out-of-home care and education for young children. In the majority of instances, these needs were met by community, voluntary or private interests and operated largely without State intervention. Since the late 1990s, the national context for the delivery of ECCE services has changed dramatically as the State has become proactive in supporting the development and delivery of a broad range of service provision. The research data contained in this report clearly shows that the impact of State support, in terms of both regulation and funding, on the ECCE workforce has been to encourage and promote a more qualified profile for many practitioners. In light of the established relationship between the qualifications profile of the ECCE workforce and the quality of both service provision and outcomes for children, this is a welcome development. However, despite the progress that has been made in a relatively short space of time, it is evident that more attention needs to be paid to the development of the ECCE workforce if future service provision and national and international policy commitments are to be met.

Conclusion

Current and future policy commitments regarding development of early childhood care and education services in Ireland reinforce the need for developing the workforce.

The Demand for Education and Training

It is clear from the survey data in this report that the most significant change in the profile of the workforce between 1999, when ADM²¹ gathered data on the qualifications of the ECCE workforce (ADM, 2003) and today, is the general rise in attainment levels of all staff in centre based settings. Despite this welcome progress, there are challenges regarding the demand for education and training in ECCE into the future. Firstly, new entrants to the field need to be appropriately qualified, secondly, unqualified or under-qualified practitioners already working in services need to become appropriately qualified. The appropriate qualification may be Level 5 or higher depending on the role and level of responsibility. Qualified people already working in the sector also need to be facilitated to progress to higher levels.

²¹ Area Development Management now known as POBAL

Conclusion

In developing a Workforce Development Plan, the current profile of the ECCE workforce presents a number of challenges that relate to both pre-service and in-service education:

1. To ensure that all new entrants to the workforce are appropriately qualified for their role and level of responsibility.
2. To afford unqualified practitioners the opportunity to achieve a Level 5 award.
3. To facilitate those holding Level 5 awards to progress to higher levels.

Meeting this Demand

While the workforce development plan needs to take initiatives on both pre-service and in-service education and training, the challenges and strategies associated with this are complex. They can be characterised as relating to two distinct issues, the design and relevance of education and training programmes and supporting learners' engagement with and completion of these programmes.

Design and relevance of education and training programmes

In 2002, an extensive consultation process with a broad range of stakeholders in the ECCE sector in Ireland resulted in the publication of the *Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development for ECCE* in Ireland. The main purpose of this Framework was to achieve sectoral consensus on the core values, content and practice that should inform national standards for awards at all levels in ECCE. In effect, this Framework was prepared to support the establishment of sectoral standards for national awards, as detailed in the 1999 Qualifications (Education and Training) Act. Sectoral award standards would help to ensure that all nationally accredited education and training programmes would adequately prepare practitioners to meet the demands of practice. This process is now underway within the National Awards Councils²² across a range of sectors, and is soon to commence for ECCE.

While the 2002 *Model Framework* achieved a high degree of consensus across the ECCE sector, there have been, since then, a number of important policy initiatives relating to qualifications and practice in ECCE. Two cross-referencing exercises were carried out to ensure that the *Model Framework's* content continued to be valid and reliable for the purposes of contributing to the setting of sectoral standards for national awards in 2009.

The first of these exercises cross-referenced the occupational profiles in the *Model Framework* with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and agreed an appropriate level of award for each occupational profile descriptor. The cross-referencing resulted in the following mapping:

²² National Awards Councils comprise the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC)

Occupational Profile from the 2002 Model Framework	NFQ Level	Comment
Basic Practitioner	Level 4	This may need to equate to a major award or the best fit may be to a minor or special purpose award at that level.
Intermediate Practitioner	Level 5	This would generally equate to a major award (FETAC Level 5 Certificate) while it may also equate to a minor or a special purpose award.
Experienced Practitioner	Level 6	This would generally equate to a FETAC Advanced Certificate at Level 6.
Advanced Practitioner	Level 7/8	This would equate to at least an Ordinary Bachelor Degree.
Expert Practitioner	Level 8/9	This would equate to at least an Honours Bachelor Degree.

The second exercise cross-referenced the occupational profiles in the *Model Framework* with *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework in Early Childhood Education and *Aistear*, the Framework for Early Learning. These latter documents have both undergone rigorous, evidence based development processes, including extensive consultation and directly impact on the nature and expectations of practice in ECCE. The outcome of this analysis showed a high degree of coherence between the three documents and proved the continued validity of the *Model Framework*. The two practice frameworks, *Síolta* and *Aistear* should be referred to in the setting of sectoral standards for national awards, as they are important national guidelines and benchmarks of professional practice in ECCE into the future and supplement the *Model Framework*.

Conclusion

It is considered that the 2002 Model Framework which has been validated against developments in the sector will, together with the National Framework of Qualifications and with *Síolta* and *Aistear*, the Framework for Early Learning inform the development of sectoral standards for all awards in early childhood care and education. The setting of these sectoral award standards is a necessary pre-requisite to the effective implementation of the Workforce Development Plan.

Access and Effective Participation in Education and Training Programmes

In 2002, the *Model Framework* identified a number of issues that would need to be addressed to allow learners in the ECCE sector to access and successfully participate in education and training opportunities.

With the work of the NQAI and the Awarding Bodies there has been a lot of progress in removing barriers for learners. The establishment of sectoral award standards in ECCE will also facilitate the review of established programmes. Challenges for the successful delivery of and participation in ECCE courses can be summarised as follows:

- Range of duration of courses leading to a particular award.
- The development of national standards for all awards.
- Flexibility in the delivery of programmes.

- The challenges of funding programmes (e.g., the non-availability of grant aid for part-time degree courses) for both learners and education and training providers.
- Releasing staff from the workplace to attend programmes.
- Adult guidance and support for non-traditional learners (e.g., literacy support or language support for those whose mother tongue is not English).

Work has already been undertaken to improve the flexibility of course delivery in ECCE. Work based education programmes such as 'One Step Up' and the Traineeship model offered by FÁS have the potential to play an important role in meeting the needs of the ECCE workforce, particularly those currently unqualified workers who wish to achieve Level 5 awards. The work of FETAC relating to the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has shown that there is a potential role for RPL in the promotion of a skilled and qualified workforce. RPL may also facilitate progression for practitioners to higher level awards. Geographical barriers to participation on courses are evident from this review and there needs to be some consideration of how this can be overcome. Web based delivery of courses may have some potential in this regard.

While ensuring that courses are available and appropriate to the needs of the ECCE workforce is a central concern, the resolution of these challenges alone will not ensure that the ECCE workforce benefits from an improved qualifications profile. Once learners have enrolled on a course they need to be effectively supported to fully participate in and achieve the final award.

Conclusion

Access and effective participation in education and training programmes continues to be important for the development of the Workforce Development Plan. Specifically, the delivery of courses in ECCE will need to address issues such as flexible delivery, RPL and the engagement and retention of learners.

Supply of Education and Training Places

Analysis of current supply of courses at all levels would indicate that there has been a sustained growth in the availability of places on ECCE courses since 2000. This expansion is welcome, particularly at third level, as international trends towards the professionalisation of ECCE would indicate that demand for third level courses is likely to continue, if not increase. The forecasting exercise undertaken as part of the development of the Workforce Development Plan will provide more detailed insight into the future demand for courses at all levels.

Conclusion

The current supply of education and training places in early childhood care and education courses has expanded significantly from 2000 to date. However, the current concentration of resources into provision of full time places may need to be reviewed if the diverse education and training demands of the ECCE workforce are to be met.

Retention of Qualified Staff in the ECCE Workforce

Evidence supplied by third level colleges indicates that the ECCE sector is experiencing difficulty in retaining qualified graduates in service provision. This may, in part, be due to the traditional low wages and status afforded to work in this area (ADM, 2003). However, regardless of the root cause, it is of concern to the Workforce Development Plan as the success of the strategy is not only measured in the creation of new education and training places but in the achievement of an appropriately trained workforce in early childhood care and education services in Ireland now and into the future.

Conclusion

Measures to address retention of qualified staff in the ECCE workforce are essential to the future development of the ECCE sector.

Concluding Comments

This report has attempted to identify the challenges that need to be addressed by the Workforce Development Plan for the ECCE sector. It has drawn together, for the first time, datasets which afford a baseline view on the current profile of the ECCE workforce in Ireland and an overview of the complex and diverse array of current educational and training opportunities available. Analysis of current and future national and international policy relating to ECCE provision and practice has highlighted the need for a skilled workforce that can deliver on the demanding challenges of supporting young children's well-being, development and learning and also contribute to the realisation of national policy objectives. The challenges for the Workforce Development Plan is to recognise the complex nature of the current workforce, acknowledge and build upon the important contribution of practitioners at all levels of practice and create opportunities for continued growth and success into the future.

Appendix A – Membership of the Interdepartmental Working Group²³

Chair (Department of Education and Science)	Seán Ó Foghlú
FÁS – Skills and Labour Market Research Unit	Jasmina Behan Ivica Milicevic Joan Mc Naboe
FÁS	Martin Dodd
Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education	Maresa Duignan
Early Years Education Policy Unit ²⁴ , Dept of Education and Science	Catherine Hynes
Dept. of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Deirdre O’Higgins Niall Egan Ciara Phelan
Further Education Section, Department of Education and Science	Breda Naughton Marian Carr Yvonne Fawcett
Office of the Minister for Children (and Youth Affairs)	Moira O’Mara
Higher Education Authority	Muiris O’Connor Tim Conlon Oliver Mooney
Secretariat (Early Years Education Policy Unit)	Noreen Moloney Maria Sheehan Tim O’Keeffe

²³ The list of people includes different representatives at different meetings

²⁴ The Early Years Education Policy Unit also provided the secretariat

Appendix B – Membership of the Sectoral Standards Sub Committee

Chair (Department of Education and Science)	Seán Ó Foghlú
National Qualifications Authority Ireland	Stuart Garvie Anna Murphy
FÁS	Linda Conway
Irish Universities Association	Francis Douglas
Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education	Maresa Duignan
Dublin Institute of Technology	Noirín Hayes
National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative	Teresa Heeney
Early Years Education Policy Unit ²⁵ , Dept. Education and Science	Catherine Hynes
FETAC	Angela Lambkin
Institutes of Technology	Vanessa Murphy
St. Nicholas Montessori	Aileen O’Brien
County Dublin VEC	Shaun Purcell
HETAC	Mary Sheridan
NCCA	Arlene Forster
Sallynoggin College of Further Education	Frances Gaynor
Secretariat (Early Years Education Policy Unit)	Noreen Moloney Maria Sheehan Tim O’Keeffe

²⁵ The Early Years Education Policy Unit also provided the secretariat

Appendix C: National Qualifications Framework



Acronyms

ADM – Area Development Management
CAO – Central Applications Office
CCC – City or County Childcare Committee
CECDE – Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
CSO – Central Statistics Office
DES – Department of Education and Science
DHC – Department of Health and Children
DIT – Dublin Institute of Technology
DJELR – Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
ECCE – Early Childhood Care and Education
ECTS – European Credit Transfer System
EOCP – Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme
EGFSN – Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
EQF – European Qualifications Framework
ESRI – Economic and Social Research Institute
FÁS – Foras Áiseanna Saothair
FETAC – Further Education and Training Awards Council
HEA – Higher Education Authority
HETAC – Higher Education and Training Awards Council
HSE – Health Service Executive
IOT – Institute of Technology
MIC – Mary Immaculate College
NCCA – National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCIP – National Childcare Investment Programme
NCNA – National Children’s Nurseries Association
NFQ – National Framework of Qualifications
NOAI – National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
NVCO – National Voluntary Childcare Organisations
OECD – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OMCYA – Office for the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
PLC – Post Leaving Certificate
QNHS – Quarterly National Household Survey
RPL – Recognition of Prior Learning
SNA – Special Needs Assistant
UCC – University College Cork
VEC – Vocational Education College

References

- Area Development Management (2003). *National Childcare Census Baseline data 1999 – 2000*. Dublin: Area Development Management.
- Centre for Early Childhood Care and Education (2005) *Insights on Quality: a national review of policy, practice and research relating to quality in early childhood care and education in Ireland 1990 – 2004*. Dublin: CECDE.
- Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (2006) *Síolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education in Ireland*. Dublin: CECDE.
- Central Statistics Office [CSO], (2006) *Principal Demographic Results*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Department of Education and Science (1999a). *Ready to Learn – A White Paper on Early Childhood Education*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Department of Education and Science (2000) *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Department of Education and Science (2004a). *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Department of Education and Science (2004b). *OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Ireland*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Department of Education and Science (2005). *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Department of Education and Science (2006). *Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Department of Health and Children (1998). *Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 1996 and Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations 1997 and Explanatory Guide to Requirements and Procedures for Notification and Inspection*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Department of Health and Children (2000). *The National Children’s Strategy. Our Children – Their Lives*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Department of Health and Children (2006). *Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 2006*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (1999). *National Childcare Strategy, Report of the Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2007) *Tomorrow’s Skills Towards a National Skills Strategy*. (5th Report). Dublin: Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.
- Government of Ireland (1999). *Qualifications (Education and Training) Act*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Moss P, (2006), Structures, Understandings and Discourses: possibilities for re-envisioning the early childhood worker. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, Volume 7, Number 1.
- National Children’s Nurseries Association (2008) *The State of the Nation’s Childcare: an analysis of the findings of the 2008 NCNA members’ survey*. Dublin: NCNA.
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, (2009) *Aistear, the Framework for Early Learning*. Dublin: NCCA.

- National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (2003) *Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression*. Dublin: NQAI.
- National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (2005) *National Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning*. Dublin: NQAI.
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2006) *Starting Strong II Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD.
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2008) *Thematic Review and Collaborative Policy Analysis Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning*. Paris: OECD.
- Oberhuemer, P. and Ulich, M. (1997). *Working with Young Children in Europe: Provision and Staff Training*. London: Paul Chapman.
- OMNA - DIT/NOW (2000). *The Final Report of OMNA - DIT/NOW Early Childhood Project 1995. Life is a Learning Curve*. Dublin: Centre for Social and Educational Research.
- Oberhuemer, P. (2005) Conceptualising the early childhood pedagogue: policy approaches and issues of professionalism. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*. 13(1) 5-16.
- Peeters, J., (2008). *The construction of a new profession: A European perspective on professionalism in Early Childhood Education and Care*.
- Sylva, K., Melhuish E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Final Report A Longitudinal Study Funded by the DfES 1997-2004*. London: Institute for Education.

Feedback Template

Your comments and suggestions on the following key issues would make a valuable contribution to the development of the Workforce Development Plan for the ECCE sector. It is essential that this consultation process is as inclusive, open and transparent as possible and for this reason, all submissions received will be published to support information sharing and informed debate of the core issues. Please ensure that you have completed the short informed consent section below otherwise your submission will not be included.

Name: _____

Organisation (if appropriate): _____

Location: _____

Please indicate your current role/interest in the ECCE sector

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Parent/guardian | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Service provider (owner/manager) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Practitioner/childminder | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Education and training provider | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Researcher | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Student | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Policy maker | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify) _____ | |

I consent that my feedback on the development of the Workforce Development Plan for the ECCE sector may be published as part of the public consultation process.

Signed _____

Please feel free to include additional pages if the response space allowed is insufficient. Alternatively this template is available online at www.omc.gov.ie

Changing practice environments

Current and future policy commitments regarding the development of early childhood care and education services in Ireland reinforce the need for developing the workforce.

Do you agree/disagree?

Agree Disagree

Additional comments

The demand for education and training

In developing a Workforce Development Plan, the current profile of the ECCE workforce presents a number of challenges that relate to both pre-service and in-service education:

1. To ensure that all new entrants to the workforce are appropriately qualified for their role and level of responsibility.
2. To afford unqualified practitioners the opportunity to achieve a Level 5 award.
3. To facilitate those holding Level 5 awards to progress to higher levels.

Do you agree/disagree?

Agree Disagree

Additional comments

Sectoral standards for awards in ECCE

It is considered that the 2002 Model Framework which has been validated against developments in the sector will, together with the National Framework of Qualifications and with *Síolta* and *Aistear*, the Framework for Early Learning inform the development of sectoral standards for all awards in early childhood care and education. The setting of these sectoral standards is a necessary prerequisite to the effective implementation of the Workforce Development Plan.

Do you agree/disagree?

Agree Disagree

Additional comments

Access and effective participation in education and training programmes

Access and effective participation in education and training programmes continues to be important for the development of the Workforce Development Plan. Specifically, the delivery of courses in ECCE will need to address issues such as flexible delivery, RPL and the engagement and retention of learners.

Do you agree/disagree?

Agree Disagree

Additional comments

Supply of education and training places

The current supply of education and training places in early childhood care and education courses has expanded significantly from 2000 to date. However, the current concentration of resources into provision of full time places may need to be reviewed if the diverse education and training demands of the ECCE workforce are to be met.

Do you agree/disagree with this statement?

Agree Disagree

Additional comments

Retention of qualified staff

Measures to address retention of qualified staff in the ECCE workforce are essential to the future development of the ECCE sector.

Do you agree/disagree?

Agree Disagree

Additional comments

Any additional comments

Thank you for your contribution.